THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE

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NAPOLEON SOLO
ILLYA KURYAKIN

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THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE

NAPOLEON SOLO · ILLYA KURYAKIN

AUGUST, 1966 Vol. 2, No. 1

NEW FULL LENGTH U.N.C.L.E. NOVEL

THE CAT AND MOUSE AFFAIR

by ROBERT HART DAVIS

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Deep in a troubled new island nation, insurgent forces were marshalling to destroy it, as Illya and Napoleon face their most bizarre and perilous adversary—the saint who had sold himself to the devil to betray the millions who had promised to die for him! . . . . . 2 to 70

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THE CAT AND MOUSE AFFAIR

by ROBERT HART DAVIS

On an island where Death was king and Treachery the only password, Napoleon and Illya sought the dreadful answer to the saint who had sold himself to the devil — to betray the world!

ACT I—WHO SHOOTS LAST, SHOOTS BEST

THERE WAS a fog that night over San Pablo.

San Pablo is the capital city of Zambala, the new island nation off the northeast coast of South America.

The former British colony has been free for some years. Free and proud of its stable and progressive government under the leadership of its liberation-hero and premier, Malcolm Martinez Roy—M. M. Roy, the Lion of Zambala!

San Pablo is an old pirate city, built in an area of lowland swamps. Its deep, sheltered harbor is one of the finest in the world. The long, curving waterfront road is lined with piers on the water side and the old buildings of the pirate city on the land side. The waterfront is an area of tourist shops, restaurants

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FEATURING

NAPOLEON SOLO and ILLYA KURYAKIN

good and bad, and hotels both old and new.

One of the oldest hotels is The Morgan House. It is back from the water, just off Front Street. It is a quiet hotel, frequented now largely by sailors and their women friends.

Its tavern is a noted tourist site, a place where the tourists can see some life-in-the-raw at a minimum risk. No tourists actually stay at The Morgan House—that is life a little too raw. The rooms on the second, third and fourth floors of the old building are cheap and used only by sailors, furtive men with no visible occupations, and the transients of the tropics.

This night, because of the thick and evil-smelling fog, the tavern was empty of all but a few silent sailors. By midnight the tavern was as silent as a tomb. Only the distant horns of the buoys, the far-off bells, the faint lap-lap of the water against the piers, could be heard in the tavern, where a last few sailors drank themselves to sleep.

Shots tore the fog and the silence just after midnight.

Shots from the second floor of The Morgan House.

The owner of the hotel, one Nathan Bedford, did not go to investigate. He knew violence too well. He immediately picked up his telephone and called for the police. Then he stationed himself at a particular corner of the bar.

From this spot, and only from this spot, Bedford had a clear view of the front stairs and of the back stairs. They were the only two ways out of the hotel.

As Bedford watched and waited, he held a large, heavy pistol in his hand out of sight beneath the bar.

But no one came down the stairs.

When the police arrived, no one had come down the stairs.

Bedford nodded to the stairs, raised two fingers to indicate the second floor. There were four policemen. Three constables and a sergeant, all dressed in the khaki shirts and shorts, with the black Sam Brown belts, the military caps and high socks made so familiar throughout the world by the British. The large chevrons of the sergeant seemed to bristle.

"Shots, Nathan?"

"Two. No one has come down, Sergeant."

"Some day we will have to close you down," the sergeant said.

With that, the sergeant led two of his men up the front stairs. The third policeman remained on guard at the foot of the rear stairs. The sergeant and his men, covering each other, went from room to room on the second floor.

They found the dead man in room 202.

The sergeant looked at the dead man on the floor, then at the man standing in the center of the room with his pistol still in his hand.

"Good evening, Sergeant," the man said.

He was a tall man, broad and

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athletic. His jet black hair was cropped short, and he wore a simple white linen suit. But his face was a face the sergeant stared at. A face the sergeant knew only too well. The sergeant blinked, began to stammer.

"Sir! I—"

The tall man smiled. "I have touched nothing, Sergeant. All remains as it was. You will note the pistol in the dead man's hand. It has been fired once. Luckily, I came armed and am a better shot."

"Yes—Yessir!" the sergeant stammered.

"Get hold of yourself, Sergeant. You have your duty to do. Take my weapon and call your superiors at once."

The sergeant nodded, took the pistol from the tall man, and barked an order to one of his men to call the inspector. Then he turned and saluted the tall man.

"If Your Excellency will be seated," the sergeant said. "Inspector Tembo will be here immediately."

The tall man, M. M. Roy, Premier of Zambala, sat down and lit a long cigarette.

Some hours later, dawn beginning to break over the port city of San Pablo, the fog blown away on the dawn wind, Inspector James Tembo completed his interrogation of the premier at the central police station of the city.

Tembo rubbed a gaunt chin as he closed his book.

"That should do it, Your Excellency. The dead man has been identified as Pandit Tavvi, a known leader of the Stengali. You say you went to that room to meet with the Stengali?"

The premier nodded. "I did, Inspector. Foolish, perhaps, to go alone. But I will try almost anything to bring the Stengali back into the main stream of Zambalan life. You know that has always been my cherished policy. The continued terrorist opposition of the Stengali is a frightful scar on our country. We must all work together. Zamyatta has accepted the role of peaceful opposition. Why not the Stengali?"

Tembo scratched his chin. The inspector was a small, bright man with quick eyes. "Not, I fear, as long as Max Steng lives. I have met him. He is a man of absolutely rigid principle, and he opposes you."

The premier began to pace. "I know! That is why I went. They said that Steng would be there. We were friends once. But I should have known better. Only Tavvi was there. Luckily I do not appear to

have lost my touch with the pistol."

"No," Tembo said. "Tavvi was a professional assassin, too."

"I was very foolish."

Tembo rubbed his thin chin. "It seems that your security chief was more foolish."

The premier turned to face Tembo. "Mura Khan? What—"

"He was killed less than ten minutes after you killed Tavvi, Your Excellency," Tembo said. "Shot on the street. My men have a Stengali in jail. He was found at the scene. He denies the killing, of course, but we know he is a Stengali."

Premier Roy paced the office. "I was wrong then. They must be destroyed. But it must be justice, not a political act."

The premier faced Tembo. "Well, are you going to charge me?"

"Charge you, sir?"

"Inspector, I have killed a man! There must be a full investigation. No man is above the law in Zambala! You will charge me. I will post proper bail. I will suspend myself from office until exonerated. Deputy Premier Gomez will act in my place."

"But sir, it is obviously self-defense."

"An inquiry is required, is it not? Then there will be an inquiry. I want the same treatment you will give that Stengali suspected of killing Mura Khan. Further, since we seem to be dealing with a series of assassinations by the Stengali, I will recommend to Gomez that he form an international tribunal to oversee the investigation. I will have him appoint Carlos Ramirez as chairman!"

Tembo seemed excited. "Your Excellency, this will be good for Zambala. No one above the law! And Carlos Ramirez! Our greatest man and greatest poet! May I also suggest Martin O'Hara?"

"Good," Roy said. "That will show how impartial we in Zambala are. O'Hara is of one of our oldest colonial families. Now, shall we get on with it, Inspector?"

The inspector stood up and bowed the premier out, to be charged like any common criminal. Within an hour all of San Pablo knew what had happened; within three hours all of Zambala knew. There was a great outcry against the Stengali underground organization.

The streets of San Pablo were jammed with cheering students. The army declared itself solidly behind the premier. Carlos Ramirez, the old pacifist, poet and national hero of Zambala, accepted the post of chairman of the international tribunal to investigate the situation.

The whole world applauded the action.

Some time later, alone in his office, Inspector Tembo made a telephone call.

The man Tembo called, Martin O'Hara, took the message in his old house high on a hill overlooking San Pablo, hung up, and went straight

to a bookcase in his elegant library. He touched the bookcase, and it opened. He went through the opening. The secret door closed behind him.

He stood alone in a bright room lined with steel and heavily soundproofed. Instruments, filing cabinets, maps and communication equipment filled the first room. Along a windowless corridor there were unmarked doors into other rooms, the doors having neither knobs nor visible locks.

In the first room Martin O'Hara went directly to a large electronic console and flipped a switch.

"Code ten. Code ten. Agent O'-Hara, Section two Chief in Zambala on direct relay to Waverly in New York. Code ten. Come in, Mr. Waverly."

TWO

SAN PABLO Prison is a combination of old and new. The center part of the building that stands on the side of a hill just south of the city is the grim old original prison from the pirate days. The two wings are more modern, built within the last twenty years to hold the enemies of the colonial government before independence.

As with all buildings in San Pablo that are more than simple dwellings, the prison stands only four stories high. This is earthquake country, and four stories is as high as should be built. In the case of the prison, the hill rises steeply behind the old center section, and the hill itself touches the building up to the third floor.

It was from a cell on the third floor of the old part of the prison that the Stengali escaped, two days after the murder of the Security Chief Mura Khan. The hour was late and the night was dark. The Stengali made his break when a guard carelessly entered his cell to gather up his plate when he thought the Stengali was asleep.

The Stengali easily overpowered the guard, locked him in his cell, and made his way to an unbarred window in the guard room at the rear of the third. By chance, the guard room was empty at this time. The Stengali easily got out through the window and dropped the few feet to the hillside behind the prison.

The Stengali was halfway up the hill when the guards on the roof spotted him. Another fifty feet and he would have made good his escape. But the machine-guns of the guards on the roof cut him down. Before the guards could reach him to see if he was alive, he finished their work with his stolen pistol rather than be taken alive again.

The guards carried the body back into the prison. They were not happy. They had let him escape. They had let him take a pistol. Now he was dead and could not be questioned. They were very quiet as they carried him back into the prison.

The night returned to darkness and to silence.

A man stepped from a clump of trees at the top of the hill behind the prison. This man stood in the night and watched the guards carry the dead Stengali back into the prison.

He was a strange figure in the night as the moon rose above San Pablo.

He was an old man, stooped and with a twisted left arm. One eye was covered with an evil-looking patch. His face was scarred like some rutted old road, and his hair was white and hung down over his face in ragged strings. His clothes were rags, and his feet were wrapped in filthy cloths. He carried a long, thick staff which he leaned on as he stared down the hill at the silent prison.

Suddenly, he seemed to raise his hand to his lips and bite the knuckle of his thumb. At the same time he seemed to bow his head toward the dark bulk of the prison. Then he turned sharply and moved off down the hill toward the road on the other side of the prison. He moved with amazing agility for a man so old and crippled.

As he reached the road, he stood clear in the moonlight for a long moment. It was then that the cup suspended around his neck was visible, and the mark on his left hand that told the world he was a beggar!

A strange beggar. Moments after he reached the road a long, black car glided all but silently up and the old beggar got in. The car drove off into San Pablo.

The old beggar, intent first on the prison and then on the car that came for him, had not seen the other events his appearance on the hill had set in motion.

The moment the old beggar had started down the hill, another man had appeared from out of the night near the prison. This man was tall and dressed all in black. He followed the old beggar to the road and vanished into the dark trees between the road and the prison.

As he crossed a patch of moonlight his face showed briefly—or did not show!

The second man, dressed all in black, was masked! A black mask covered his entire face except his eyes, and his dark hat was pulled low over his face. When the long car picked up the beggar, the man in black followed from the trees in a jeep that had been carefully hidden there.

The third man had been seen by neither of the other two.

He was a small, slender man also dressed all in black, but neither masked nor did he wear a hat. In the dark he followed both the beggar and the masked man, his blond hair catching the moonlight from time to time. As he watched the beggar reach the road, and the masked man vanish among the trees, his quick and bright eyes narrowed beneath an habitually lowered brow.

With the silence and agility of a cat, he moved closer to the road and the beggar. Beneath the unruly blond hair, cut like the round haircut of some modern knight-errant, his handsome Slavic face was both quizzical and a trifle amused. He was about to move even closer when the black car appeared and picked up the beggar.

Immediately, the jeep emerged from the trees with the masked man driving and followed the black car toward San Pablo. The small blond man ran swiftly to the road. He bent down where a drainage culvert ran beneath the road and drew out a motorcycle. In an instant he was on the cycle and roaring off after both the black car and the jeep.

As he rode he guided the motorcycle with one hand. With the other hand he drew a pencil-like object from his pocket, pressed a tiny button, and spoke.

"Report to Zambala Headquarters. Agent Kuryakin following two men. Stengali suspected of murdering Mura Khan has been killed trying to escape. Both men being followed were at the scene. One is an old man dressed as a beggar, one eye and a twisted left arm. The second man is dressed in black and is masked. See what you have on them and check with New York."

There was a short silence as the motorcycle sped through the night. Then the pencil-radio spoke low in the voice of Martin O'Hara.

"Roger. Check will be run, Illya.

And be careful. The Stengali usually dress in black. They are very dangerous. They would have been watching the prison."

Illya Kuryakin concentrated on following the jeep ahead, and beyond the jeep the black car. The road was deserted here at the edge of the city, and the small blond U.N.C.L.E. agent was riding the motorcycle with the lights out.

"That Stengali was our only lead to the assassination plots," he said into the pencil-radio.

"I know," O'Hara said from the hidden rooms of local U.N.C.L.E.

headquarters inside his house. "Wait. Here is the check. All negative. From your descriptions neither men are in our files, but the computer emphasizes that the Stengali often dress in black."

"Thank the computer for me," Illya said drily. "Get the descriptions to New York and see what we might have there. Report that I am continuing to follow."

"Very well, Illya, but be careful," O'Hara said.

Illya clicked off his pencil-instrument and returned it to his pocket. As he did so he took his eyes from the road for an instant. When he looked up again it was too late.

The jeep was slewed directly across the road!

The masked man was already firing an ugly Soviet-made submachine gun.

By the reflex action that had saved him so many times, Illya swerved his motorcycle directly toward the ditch that bordered the dark road and began to hurl himself sideways.

Again he was too late.

The motorcycle struck the long, thick root of a tree and Illya Kuryakin hurtled helpless through the air in the dark night.

THREE

BEHIND THE innocent facade of New York brownstones, and the one modern yellow-brick building, the impregnable complex of the headquarters of The United Network Command for Law and Enforcement goes about its never-ending battle to keep the world safe for the ordinary citizen. This battle requires all the complex and secret equipment that fill the secret rooms, the vast network of communications that keep New York in touch with all the other far-flung centers of U.N.C.L.E. And the task of protecting the ordinary citizens of the world requires many extraordinary citizens.

Every hour of the day these extraordinary men go in and out of the entrance to Del Floria's Cleaning & Tailoring Shop, unnoticed by the citizens they protect. They go in and out by any of the other three known entrances to the U.N.C.L.E. complex, or by one of the secret river tunnels from the river to the lower level of U.N.C.L.E. headquarters.

One of the most extraordinary of these men, the only man in New York who knows the location of the fifth entrance to U.N.C.L.E., is Alexander Waverly, Chief of U.N.C.L.E. in the western hemisphere. the only member of Section I—Policy and Operations in the western world.

Another of the more extraordinary men was Napoleon Solo, Chief Enforcement Agent in Section II—Operations and Enforcement. Solo, dressed as always in the impeccable young executive

clothes that made him seem no more than another handsome young bachelor and successful junior executive, now sat with Alexander Waverly in the small but complete office of the Chief.

Through the windows there was a fine view of the city in the afternoon sun, and anyone looking in would have seen no more than a businessman talking to one of his assistants. The windows, of course, were never opened, and the glass was bulletproof.

Waverly himself, a gentleman over fifty but no one knew how far over, was the picture of the tweedy management man. His iron grey hair was neat if shaggy. He held an unlighted pipe, and turned the gaze of an aristocratic bloodhound on Solo.

"The last report of Mr.—uh—Kuryakin indicated that he was following two men who had been watching the San Pablo prison. Our records came up with nothing on either man, I'm afraid."

"And the Stengali prisoner was killed," Solo said. "Our only lead to what might be happening down there."

"Shot escaping, I'm afraid," Waverly said. "A pity. Although I understand the Stengali have a suicide rule if hopelessly captured."

"Shot while escaping can be arranged," Solo said.

Waverly looked for his matches in his waistcoat pocket. "I'm aware of that, Mr. Solo. That is precisely why Mr. Kuryakin is following those men."

Waverly found his matches on his desk and began to light his pipe. The unruffled chief puffed fitfully, his flat eyes and tweedy manner exactly like those of some absent-minded professor. The chief sat behind his desk and Solo faced him across it. The handsome and slender enforcement chief presented his usual relaxed, almost boyish manner that hid his deadly skills as an agent.

"Just what does O'Hara suspect down there?" Solo asked.

Waverly managed to get his pipe lighted and waved out the flame of his match. "He hasn't the slightest idea. The situation appears most confused. As you know, the international tribunal called by Deputy Premier Gomez has met only once. O'Hara reports that something is quite odd. The Stengali do not usually use assassination, but they might have started. What O'Hara cannot quite fathom is why this all began just now. However, he does feel that the evidence points to the involvement of Zamyatta."

Solo rubbed his nose. "Perhaps you had better—"

"Fill you in, as you young men say? Yes, I suppose I should do just that."

Waverly swiveled in his chair, pressed a button on his desk. A screen appeared on the wall. Waverly pressed a second button, leaned down, and said. "The Zam-

bala file, if you please, Miss—uh—Heatherly."

Napoleon Solo sighed as he always did when he heard the name of the beautiful red-headed Communications and Research Chief, Section IV. May was so beautiful, so efficient, so tantalizing. Solo sighed again and put his mind back on business. At this moment, business was the picture of a tall, black-haired, muscular and handsome man on the screen.

May Heatherly's maddeningly efficient voice intoned. "M. M. Roy, the Lion of Zambala, now premier. Roy was a leader of the Liberation Army against the British. When the British granted independence, Roy was elected premier without opposition. He has been re-elected once, two years ago."

Solo narrowed his eyes. "An election coming up?"

"No, I'm afraid not," Waverly said. "Zambala, like most ex-British colonies, operates on the parliamentary system. A general election is not due for four more years."

"But an election could be forced at any time by a vote of no confidence, or by the premier himself?" Solo said.

"Yes, of course. Next, Miss Heatherly," Waverly said.

Another picture flashed on the screen. It was the picture of a short, heavy, bull-like man about the same age as the premier himself. The man was much darker and his face showed two long scars.

"Jemi Zamyatta," May Heatherly said crisply. "Leader of the opposition. Zamyatta's real name is unknown. He took his present name during the struggle for liberation. After independence he was unanimously elected president. He resigned two years ago to oppose Roy for premier. He lost. Since then he has acted as an apparently loyal opposition from his seat in Parliament."

Waverly waved his pipe. "You realize that the post of president is purely ceremonial in Zambala, amounted to putting Zamyatta on the shelf. Apparently he didn't like it and came out against Roy. Zamyatta has had Soviet training; he does not like many of the concessions granted by Roy to Western countries and businessmen."

"He's a Communist?"

Waverly studied his pipe. "That is one thing we have to learn. There is no official Communist Party in Zambala, and Zamyatta has shown no heavy leanings toward the East. But one of the things O'Hara seems to fear is that he may be moving much farther left."

"Assassinations?" Solo said.

Waverly nodded slowly, his impassive face showing no emotion at all. "O'Hara seems to have proof that Zamyatta is involved in these supposed Stengali actions." Waverly now looked at his chief agent. "You realize just what a Communist government in Zambala would mean—especially under a militant

Zamyatta? It could destroy the effectiveness of half the defenses of the Western world—and lead them straight into the heart of South America!"

FOUR

ILLYA KURYAKIN hurtled through the air in the dark Zambala night. The bullets cut the air around him. Still in the air, the lithe agent doubled over and landed curled into a ball. He bounced twice and came to rest in the dark of the ditch.

Instantly he was on his knees, crouched and ready, his U.N.C.-L.E. Special out. There was a sound to his left. He moved and circled toward the left; he had no time to wait for his assailant to come to him. He caught a glimpse of the black-masked man moving toward him. The man had removed his mask! A sharp, arrogant face.

Illya worked his way around in the night until, through the movements of both of them, he was to the left and behind the stalking man. Cautiously, Illya stalked him in turn in the night. But the man was no amateur. He heard Illya, guessed what was happening, and went to cover. With a sudden grin, the blond U.N.C.L.E. agent let go with a burst from his Special, set on automatic.

The man had vanished, pinned down. Illya Kuryakin was now between the man and the road. The black car was still moving away. Illya had no time to waste on the man who had spotted him. He fired another burst and broke for the road at full speed.

He did not even look at his motorcycle. He raced to the jeep and jumped in. As he had expected, the keys were still in the ignition. He started the jeep and roared away in the night, just as the masked man ran out on to the road. The last volley from the man's sub-machinegun whistled harmlessly above Illya's head.

With a wave, Illya pressed down on the gas and the jeep leaped ahead.

Soon he was in the city itself. There was more traffic now, and he saw the black car ahead. It was easy to spot, and his photographic memory had already memorized the license plate. He carefully brought the jeep closer and continued to follow the black car through the night streets of San Pablo.

The car moved at an easy pace

through the capital city, with Illya following at a respectful distance. The chase seemed to wander erratically along the crowded main avenues and through dark side streets.

But as he drove the jeep, Illya became aware of the fact that no matter how much the black car turned and twisted, it always headed in the end closer to the harbor.

When the black car finally stopped, the dark water of the harbor stretched silent in the night to Illya's right. He parked the jeep some fifty yards away from the black car at the edge of the water. He watched as three men got out of the black car and walked into a small waterfront tavern set out over the harbor on wooden pilings.

The beggar was not one of them. All three men who got out of the black car were dressed in business suits. They entered the tavern like any other patrons out for a night of pleasure. Illya waited until the door of the tavern had closed behind them. Then he moved swiftly past the black car.

The car had a man still in the front seat.

In the dark night his eyes looked from under his lowered brows at the tavern. A sign above the door read simply: Harbor Inn. Illya returned his attention to the black car. There was nothing inside the car to give him any clue as to the fate of the old begger. Only the driver slumped down, eyes closed.

Illya crouched down in the night beside the black car and took out his pencil-radio. He pressed the send button.

"Code ten. Kuryakin to O'Hara. Relay to Waverly, New York."

The pencil whispered in the night. "O'Hara here. Waverly standing by on relay."

Illya crisply reported what had happened to the masked man in black, and to the beggar. "It appears that the beggar either left the car during the time I was evading the masked man, or else his outfit was a disguise."

Waverly sucked on his pipe and arched a bushy eyebrow in the direction of Napoleon Solo as they listened to the direct relay from Illya Kuryakin in far-off San Pablo.

"It is somewhat important whether the beggar eluded you or is one of the men in that tavern, Mr. Kuryakin," Waverly said drily into his transmitter in the small office. "I suggest you get on to it. What is your estimate of the masked man? Was he trying to stop you on his own, or was he covering for the beggar?"

"I don't know that yet," Illya's voice said from beside the black car in San Pablo.

"I expect you will," Waverly said. "Report to me when you do know."

"Yes sir," Illya said, and clicked off.

Waverly replaced his microphone on the large communications console and turned to Solo.

The bushy eyebrows of the chief were knotted in concentration. He sucked on his pipe, began his perennial search for matches in his pockets.

"One of those men was certainly a Stengali. The question is—which one, and who is the other man? Unless, of course, they are both Stengali covering each other."

"It doesn't sound like it from their actions," Solo said.

Waverly found his matches. "No, it doesn't, does it? Well, I expect Mr. Kuryakin will report on that soon enough. Meanwhile, we have Mr. O'Hara to keep close touch with the affairs of the Stengali."

"Could Zamyatta have joined forces with the Stengali?" Solo said.

"That is a distinct possibility, and not a pleasant one. Zambala is a key link in the entire Western Hemisphere defense."

"Just what is the Stengali?" Solo asked.

Waverly managed to light his pipe again. "If you would spend more time in our library, Mr. Solo, and less time with the young lady librarian, you would know. However, I will not press the matter. Miss Heatherly, if you please."

Another picture flashed onto the wall screen in the small office of the U.N.C.L.E. Chief. It was a picture of a small, wiry man about forty years old. His beard was thin, little more than a wisp on his chin, and his eyes were large and deep—the powerful eyes of a fanatic, yet not at all insane. The clear power of a dedicated man was in those eyes.

"Max Steng," Waverly said. "Little is known of his early history, except that he is not a native Zambalan. There are those who think he was born in New York, but his birthplace is usually given as London. He was another of the leaders against the British. But unlike either M. M. Roy or Zamyatta, he always refused to deal in any way. From the start he led an armed band. He has said that he will settle for nothing but complete independence, complete autonomy, and complete neutrality."

"A difficult goal these days," Solo remarked drily.

"Steng is a difficult man, Mr. Solo," Waverly said. "He is also extremely astute. He broke with M. M. Roy when he guessed that Roy was going to make a deal with the British. He broke with Zamyatta less than a year later, with the curt pronouncement that Zamyatta was only the tails to Roy's heads. He refused any part in the new government and went underground."

"I gather he is still there?" Solo said.

"Perhaps, Mr. Solo. The rumors are many. You can take your pick. Steng has been reported dead, in Russia, in China, in Africa. His underground has been reported disbanded, doubled. All I know for certain is that Max Steng is a military genius, especially at guerilla

warfare. I doubt that he is dead. I imagine that the Stengali are very much alive, and that is not good for the Western world."

"What does Steng have against Roy?" Solo said.

"Primarily his retention of some British influence and aid, and Roy's close ties with the West. Our missile bases, for example. Steng wants complete neutrality. He has his own theories of government, as most fanatics do. The danger, obviously, is that Steng and his Stengali might be used by someone else. His methods have always been to take over small areas and apply his theories. He has never used assassination. If he has now turned to methodical assassination as a weapon, then—"

"Then someone else may be directing him and his gang," Solo completed.

"Precisely," Waverly said. "And not necessarily another power or government. Zambala is highly strategically placed."

"THRUSH?" Solo said.

"The possibility has occurred to me," Waverly said. "Steng might be just the man to be fooled by THRUSH suggesting a third-road government."

"Is there any hint of THRUSH?"

"No, I must say there isn't—yet. As it stands, Premier Roy has been forced to kill a would-be assassin, and Mura Khan, Security Chief of Zambala, has been assassinated. Both the man Roy killed, and the man who was suspected of killing Mura Khan, were known members of the Stengali. O'Hara seems to think there is some connection between Zamyatta and the Stengali now. O'Hara also reported that Inspector Tembo was not happy with the whole affair. All in all, Mr. Solo, it adds up to a state of unrest in Zambala, and that is something we do not want."

"What about this international tribunal?" Solo said. "Can they do anything?"

Waverly puffed on his pipe. "Perhaps. I think the tribunal is primarily a good move by Premier Roy to forestall civil violence. The Zambalans are hot-blooded. But a tribunal may make them feel the situation is being handled fairly. Especially with Ramirez heading the tribunal. Miss Heatherly, please."

A fourth picture flashed onto the screen. It was the picture of an old man, tall and white-haired, the epitome of a Spanish grandee of the old school.

The eyes were strong and alert, and the man leaned heavily on a cane.

Waverly smiled as he looked at this picture. "Carlos Ramirez, Mr. Solo. A living legend," he said. "The greatest poet of South America, a fighter in all causes of freedom, and a life-long pacifist. A truly amazing man, Carlos Ramirez. I have had the privilege of meeting him many times. He began life as a landowner and grandee, inherited the largest sugar planta-

tion of the island, built it into many businesses.

"Then, in middle-age, he became a poet and world-renowned pacifist. Still later, when the struggles for freedom began, he joined the fight. His leg was shattered by a British bomb. He is the only man I know who has engaged in violence while remaining a pacifist and meaning it. A man of great dignity. With him on the tribunal, the world will take notice."

"Who are the other members?" Solo asked.

"Two men from the West, one from Poland, one from India. Three Zambalans: Ramirez, O'Hara, and a labor leader named Mark Boya. But Ramirez is the guiding genius."

"And you want me to go down and stay close to the tribunal?" Solo said.

"Yes, I fear possible attacks on the tribunal itself. We . . ."

The low *beep-beep-beep* of overseas communication began to sound from the large console in the small office. Waverly touched a button on his desk. Instantly a voice entered the room, the voice of Martin O'Hara.

". . . report a bomb thrown at the tribunal, two injured. Also a second attempt on the life of Premier Roy. Situation urgent; Stengali apparently making all out war. In my opinion they must be getting help, probably from elements of the army."

Waverly held his microphone. "Any further word from Mr. Kuryakin?"

There was a pause. Then, "Unable to contact agent Kuryakin!"

FIVE

THE HARBOR INN on the waterfront of San Pablo was a small tavern with two rooms and a kitchen in the rear. The first room contained the bar and some tables. The second room, through an archway, contained booths on either side. The kitchen opened to the rear of this second room.

Less than an hour after they had left the black car, the three men in business suits sat in a rear booth. They looked at their watches from time to time. They did not notice the shabby dock-worker who limped into the tavern and stood leaning on the bar at the end nearest the rear room.

This dock-worker was small and slender, and his black hair was cut thick and long. His nose was heavy and broken, and there was a long scar on his dark face. His clothes were the rags worn by the poor of San Pablo. He drank the cheapest raw rum made for the poor from the dregs of the sugar cane. To look at he was no different from thousands of other poor workers of San Pablo. Even his limp was common in a country where the poor worked hard and were often injured.

But his eyes were not the eyes of a San Pablo dock-worker. They

were sharp eyes, shrewd and glittering and they were blue!

They were the eyes of Illya Kuryakin.

Kuryakin watched the three men.

He watched them for an hour before the other two men came into the Harbor Inn.

The two newcomers were a grotesque contrast. The man who came in last was broad and powerful and held his hand in his suit pocket. The man who walked in front of the broad man was small and frightened. This small man wore a white suit and his hands shook. His eyes darted around like some small animal looking for escape. There was no escape.

The scared man was marched to the booth where the three men waited.

The man in the booth who spoke was obviously the leader.

"Sit down, Nathan," the man said.

Where he leaned on the bar Illya watched this man, the one who had spoken. He saw that this man was of average height, not big but in good condition, with the movements of a trained soldier. His hair was grey and long. There were scars on his face. He could have been the old beggar with a patch over his eye and a certain amount of make-up.

"Give Mr. Bedford room to sit down," the man said to his companions.

Illya Kuryakin immediately turned his attention to the small man who was so frightened. Nathan Bedford! That was the name of the owner of The Morgan House, the cheap hotel where Premier Roy had killed the Stengali leader, Tavvi. A very frightened Nathan Bedford. The owner of the hotel sat down like a man sitting on the edge of a very high cliff. The grey-haired man with the scarred face smiled pleasantly.

"So, Nathan," the grey-haired man said. "It has been a long time. Alas, we do not get into San Pablo often."

"Too long, Mr. Smith," the frightened Bedford said.

"We were always friends, Nathan."

"Of course, Mr. Smith. The best," the terrified owner said.

"Then you will tell me all about what really happened the night the premier shot Tavvi, won't you?"

"Sure, sure, Mr. Smith," Bedford stammered. "Only I was downstairs. You know I stay downstairs. I didn't see—"

"Suppose I judge that? You just start from the very beginning. Now, who paid for that room?"

Bedford licked his dry lips. "Tembo asked me that, too. I don't know. It was a woman. She wore a veil. She came in and took the room from my assistant. She gave her name as Brown. Then—"

The frightened owner suddenly lowered his voice and bent closer to the man he called Mr. Smith. At

the bar Illya moved closer, then started for a booth. He saw the eyes of the other men with Mr. Smith watching him closely. Instead of stopping at a booth he continued on back to the men's room near the kitchen.

When he came out, Bedford was already standing up. The grey-haired man called Mr. Smith was still seated and staring up at Bedford. The hotel owner was as pale as a ghost. Then Smith waved his hand.

"All right, Nathan. But try to remember a little more, eh?"

"Yes, Mr. Smith. Anything I remember."

"Good," the grey-haired Mr. Smith said. "See Nathan to the door, Sergeant."

The broad, powerful man nodded to Bedford and the two men headed for the door. Illya, passing the booth on his way back to the bar, limping in his dock-worker's rags, heard the use of the rank. Smith had called his man *Sergeant!* Then the men from the black car, the beggar, and the powerful man were all members of some military unit!

At the bar, Illya ordered another of the cheapest rums, and paid for it, just as the powerful man returned. Illya watched the men from the black car put their heads together in the booth for a conference.

Then he heard it.

A faint, strangled cry.

Low or distant, it was impossible to tell which.

But Illya had heard the cry, there was no doubt. And he was not the only one. In the booth the men in business suits stopped talking and sat alert. The bartender stopped mixing a drink to stare at the door. Two other men at the bar turned.

Illya was on his way to the door. He reached it and went through on the run. He saw the cause of the cry in the middle of the street.

Nathan Bedford lay there. Illya did not have to go to the man. Bedford lay on his back with his throat cut wide open, a pool of blood spreading from him.

There was no one else on the street.

But far down the dark waterfront Illya thought he saw a tall black figure running silently away. He watched the figure until he became aware of something behind him.

The disguised U.N.C.L.E. agent whirled. The men from the black car stood close behind him. They were looking at the body of Nathan Bedford, and at Illya. They were looking at his leg. Too late Illya realized his mistake. In his haste to get out and find the source of the strangled cry he had forgotten to limp.

Now the grey-haired man, Mr. Smith, raised his hand slowly and pointed to Illya's eyes. In making his disguise there had been no time to disguise his eyes with contact lenses. His eyes were blue! Black hair and a dark skin and the rags of a native Zambalan dock-worker—with blue eyes.

The men came toward him with their hands in their pockets.

Illya looked around quickly. Behind him two more men in business suits. Illya wasted no time. He reached into his pockets and dropped the small smoke bomb.

As the smoke exploded, raising a blinding smoke screen, Illya turned with his U.N.C.L.E. Special out and ran toward the two men behind him. His Special set on sleep-darts, he shot one of the men at once. The other hurled himself sideways and clawed for his pistol. Illya shot him. He leaped over the prostrate forms of the two men and raced away down the street.

The black car, its lights on, blocked his path. He whirled and raced toward the water. As he reached the edge of the water a light flashed on him from below, from some boat. To escape the light, Illya ducked and began to run to his right.

The land ended abruptly in a sharp right turn.

Illya whirled. They were all around him. Something struck his head and it all turned green and red and—black.

In New York, Alexander Waverly sucked on his cold pipe and slowly paced his silent office. The outer door slid open. Napoleon Solo entered. The face of the handsome young chief agent of Section II showed concern. Waverly wasted no time on useless words.

"O'Hara reports that all attempts to contact Kuryakin have failed. Two of his agents discovered that a man named Nathan Bedford was killed in the street on the San Pablo waterfront."

"The owner of The Morgan House," Solo said.

"Precisely," Waverly agreed. "The police have no clues. The patrons of the Harbor Inn, a waterfront tavern nearby, claim to have heard nothing."

"Naturally," Solo said.

"They claim further that a crippled dock-worker ran out of the Harbor Inn about the time of the

killing. They said he ran, although he had seemed to be crippled."

"Illya!" Solo said.

"O'Hara agrees. The men he sent found a black wig floating in the water nearby. I should say that Mr. Kuryakin is in need of help."

"I'll be on a plane in an hour," Solo said.

Waverly nodded. "Yes. See that you are. But remember, Mr. Solo, your primary mission in Zambala is to find out what is behind these assassinations and attempts. That comes first. If you have time, see what you can do for Mr. Kuryakin, but the mission is first, as always."

"Yes, sir."

Waverly began to light his pipe. "I rather imagine Mr. Kuryakin can take good care of himself. In a way, this may be all in our favor. I trust Mr. Kuryakin is learning much."

"Yes, sir," Solo said as he left.

The cold manner of his chief did not fool him. Waverly was as concerned as he was about Illya, but Waverly headed an organization charged with saving the world from itself if necessary, and one agent was only one agent.

To Napoleon Solo it was different. This agent was Illya Kuryakin.

* * *

ILLYA KURYAKIN opened his eyes. The blond agent grimaced at the pain in his head. He felt his head and found a soft and sticky wound. He tried to rise and found his feet tied securely.

A voice spoke. "Now tell us who you are and who you work for."

Illya looked across the room. Seated on a chair in the room that was not a room but a cave, was a small, wiry man of about forty. The man was dressed all in black with some kind of military insignia on shoulder straps. The man held a pistol and wore soft black boots.

Next to the small, wiry man stood the grey-haired Mr. Smith.

"I'm a voodoo doll," Illya said.

The small, wiry man stood up and came close to Illya. The blond U.N.C.L.E. agent looked up at the man. He saw that the small man wore a thin beard that was almost white, a wisp of long hair on the man's chin. And the eyes that looked down at Illya were large and deep, the powerful eyes of a fanatic.

"Tell us who you are," the man said softly.

Behind the small, wiry man with the wisp of beard there were many other men wearing black uniforms in the silent cave.

ACT II
GO, BID THE SOLDIERS SHOOT!

POLICE HEADQUARTERS in San Pablo is the lower two floors of the left wing of the prison. At night there is only a guard at a desk just inside the door. Police are there, but the corridors are dim and quiet during late night hours.

This night, the single guard dozed at his desk. Since the murder of Nathan Bedford, the police had been working hard and the guard had done a double shift. With the murder, the assassination attempts on the premier, and the threat of a Stengali war, the San Pablo police were short-handed and the guard did not hear the soft footsteps approach him.

He came alert just long enough to see the boyish young man leap on him and hold the cloth over his mouth.

The guard asleep, Napoleon Solo stepped over his prostrate form and moved on into the building. There were low voices talking somewhere as Solo moved as silent as a cat along the dim halls. The office of Inspector Tembo was on the second floor in the rear.

As yet the involvement of U.N.C.L.E. in the affairs of Zambala was not known, and Solo intended to keep it that way. He wanted to talk to Inspector Tembo, but first he wanted to search the office of the inspector. Tembo was aware of the true identity of Martin O'Hara, and had tacitly called U.N.C.L.E. into the matter. Solo wanted to know why.

He moved quickly up the stairs to the second floor. The long corridor was empty. There was no sound. At the far end of the corridor light showed under the door of one office. Solo moved catlike along the corridor. The door that showed light was Inspector Tembo's office!

Solo frowned. Tembo was in his office. There would be no opportunity to search. He put his U.N.C.L.E. Special away in its shoulder holster and stepped to the door. For some reason, some sixth sense perhaps, he opened the door quietly and without knocking.

It was a small office with a single window and the ground of the hill behind the prison close outside the window. There were two straight chairs, filing cabinets, and a small wooden desk. But it was not the furniture nor the office itself that Solo saw first.

And it was not Inspector Tembo.

The chair behind the desk was empty.

The window was open.

And behind the desk, studying papers on the desk, stood a tall, slender woman wearing a black uniform!

The woman heard him the instant he saw her. She looked up. Solo saw that she wore a black hood as a mask, only her sharp eyes visible through the eye-holes. Green eyes. Solo reached for his Special. The woman did not wait. Her hand snaked into her pocket and came out with a round, black object.

Solo threw himself backwards, his Special out.

There was no chance to fire.

The woman dropped the black

object and a thick cloud of dark smoke filled the small office.

Choking, Solo backed out of the office and dug in his pocket. He brought out his miniature gas mask, opened it, and placed it over his nose and mouth. He ran back into the office and through the thick smoke.

The office was empty.

Solo went through the window in a single leap. Ahead up the hill the woman ran. She turned at the crest and fired. Solo dived for the dirt. The bullet whistled past his ear. He was up and running. At the crest of the hill he looked down. The woman was vanishing into a clump of trees. Solo raced down after her.

They came out of the trees.

Four of them—men wearing black uniforms, their ugly Soviet submachine-guns in their hands and pointing up the hill at Solo. The U.N.C.L.E. agent skidded to a halt on the steep downslope.

The four men began to move toward him up the hill.

* * *

ILLYA KURYAKIN awoke and they were there again. The small, wiry man with the wisp of beard. The grey-haired man called Mr. Smith. The silent guards in the black uniforms. Illya struggled up to a sitting position on the cold floor of the cave.

They had been questioning him for hours. He had no idea what time it was, whether it was night or day, whether days had passed or only hours. As soon as he slept, they awakened him and it began again. The questions.

"Tell us who you are and who you work for," the small man with the thin wisp of beard asked quietly.

"No," Illya said, his voice a croak now, his throat dry for lack of water.

"Why are you in Zambala? Who sent you?" the man named Mr. Smith asked.

Illya said nothing. They were the same questions. Behind the two men who asked the same questions over and over, Illya saw the guards as silent and motionless as ever. There was nothing else, only the blank stone walls of the cave, the steel door behind the guards, and beyond the door, what?

"You were following the beggar? Why?" the man with the wisp of beard asked.

"You were watching the prison. Why?" the man named Mr. Smith asked.

Illya's weary mind came alert. These were new questions! There had been a sudden change, a shift in questions, as if the men in front of him thought that it was time to change, that his resistance was ebbing and a sudden shift would confuse him.

Illya fought to keep his mind steady, because they were almost right. The hours were beginning to

work on him. He battled within his mind to keep control.

"Tell us why you were there at the prison," the man with the thin beard said. "What did you suspect?"

"What made you interested?" Mr. Smith said.

"What do you know about Premier Roy?"

"What was Pandit Tavvi doing in that room?"

"Why was Tavvi killed?"

"Who sent the premier to that room?"

"Who do you work for?"

"Who are you?"

Illya's mind reeled. No sleep for —how long? Was it day or night? Where was this cave? Where was Napoleon? Illya felt his mind slipping, losing its grip. Slipping . . . slipping . . . slipping . . . With a powerful effort, unseen by the pounding questioners, he moved his free forearm across one of the rings on his right hand. With his thumb, the thumb of his right hand, he pressed hard against the ring on the inside. He felt the tiny prick.

The needle, which came a hair out from the ring when he pressed against the inside of the ring, pricked his forearm. He hung on, forcing his brain to remain alert. Ten seconds . . . twenty seconds.

Almost a minute, and the questions continued to reel against his brain. Then he felt it, the powerful drug coursing through his body. The emergency drug intended for just such a situation, to be used only in extremity because of its side-effects.

The drug entered his brain and, suddenly, he felt no more fatigue, no weariness, no slipping of his senses. He felt strong, alert, in complete control. He showed none of this to his interrogators. Instead he continued to pretend that he was on the edge of breaking.

"What really happened at The Morgan House?" the man with the wisp of beard said.

"Why was Tavvi there?" Mr. Smith said.

Illya listened now, his brain clear, more than clear. Alert, he heard the questions. They were asking him what they should have known! Pandit Tavvi was one of the Stengali, and these men had to be the Stengali—or did they? He had been sure that these were the Stengali, but now—if they were the Stengali, why were they asking what had happened in that room of The Morgan House? And if they were not the Stengali, who were they?

* * *

NAPOLEON SOLO laid down a withering fire from his U.N.C.L.E. Special on automatic. The four men in black went to ground. Instantly, Solo crawled back over the crest of the hill and ran down the hill, back toward the prison. The four men came to the crest of the hill, stood

there against the lighter dark of the sky for a moment, and then vanished.

Solo stopped running. He stared back up the hill. There was no doubt; they had stopped their pursuit. He turned and went back to the window, climbed through into the office of Inspector Tembo. His foot struck a soft object behind the desk.

He looked down and saw the body.

The body of a gaunt-faced man of medium height. It had been behind the desk, between the desk and the window, and Solo had not seen it when he pursued the woman. Now he saw it, and he guessed at once who it was. To be sure, he bent down and took out the man's wallet. The identity card left no doubt: Inspector James Tembo!

Solo stood up and rubbed his chin. He would not have the chance to question Inspector James Tembo. The man had been stabbed once, expertly and finally. Why? Without a doubt so that someone like Solo could not question the inspector.

Which meant that someone knew, or thought, that the inspector had known something important.

What? Solo looked down at the littered desk of the dead man. The woman had been searching the desk when he surprised her. He studied the papers on the desk and found that the folder on top was the folder of the killing of Pandit Tavvi and Mura Khan. A notation was written across the page in a neat, precise hand:

Why would Tavvi go to the room alone? Why would Roy go alone? Check movements of P. Tavvi.

Solo's eyes glistened as he read the notations—Inspector Tembo had not been satisfied with the explanations of the events in The Morgan House.

But that was all. The rest was the routine report Solo already knew in detail. The agent turned his attention to the office itself. Everything seemed in order. Then his eyes fell on the small object beside the body of Tembo.

Solo bent and picked it up.

It was a matchbook—a personalized matchbook with the name: *Jezzi Mahal, The Silver Dunes.* Solo grinned. It looked very much like his masked lady had left her calling card. Solo decided he would pay a call on Miss Jezzi Mahal.

But before that, he would pay a visit to The Harbor Inn. If Illya had not yet reported in. Solo took out his pencil-radio and pressed the send button.

"Code four. Napoleon Solo to Zambala Control. Come in, Zambala Control."

The pencil-radio crackled. The voice of O'Hara's chief assistant was clear, cool, and enticingly female. "Zambala Control. Come in, Agent Solo."

Solo made a mental note to meet O'Hara's assistant as soon as possi-

ble. "Is there any word yet from Agent Kuryakin?"

"Negative. No contact with Agent Kuryakin since yesterday. Channel of his transmitter has been continuously open," the low, throaty voice said.

Solo nodded grimly. "Call as soon as there is contact. Make it a priority One, Code ten."

A priority One was the only call that could break radio silence to an agent on active assignment. "Priority One. Will do. Over and out."

For a brief moment, Solo imagined the face and form of the female voice. Then he sighed aloud, climbed out the window over the motionless body of Inspector Tembo, and moved swiftly through the night to his car. He drove toward the waterfront and The Harbor Inn.

When he reached the silent and deserted area of the waterfront of San Pablo where The Harbor Inn's lights were gaudy in the night, Solo reached into his attache case on the front seat beside him and took out a small electronic instrument. He parked his car and got out. The instrument in his hand, he started at the door of The Harbor Inn.

The instrument showed no response. He walked away from the inn toward the edge of the water, where the wig had been found floating by O'Hara's men.

The instrument began to register at a spot where the sidewalk turned sharply away from the water. Solo smiled to himself. Illya had left the trail—the private trail of sensitized liquid from his shoes that only Napoleon Solo could pick up on his detector.

Solo returned to his car, and, with the detector set on the dashboard in front of him, picked up the trail and started to drive out of the city. The trail led deep into the hills and jungle to the north of San Pablo.

A half an hour later, thirty miles north of San Pablo, Solo became aware that he was not alone.

The lights of a truck moved steadily behind him.

TWO

THEY HAD come and gone twice more before Illya Kuryakin saw his chance. The last time the black-uniformed guard failed to tie his hands securely, the many tieings and untieings having made the guard careless. After all, how could this small blond man escape from the locked cave room, even if he got his hands free?

Illya smiled grimly to himself—the guard would find out. He waited what he estimated were ten minutes for the routine of the guards to become normal. Then he went to work on his bonds. They were a fraction too loose. By using all his trained skills, the small Russian squeezed his open hand into the smallest space possible and strained to slip them through the bonds.

Sweat stood out in beads on his head.

He strained, drawing his narrowed hand through the ropes—and the hand began to slip. Shaking the sweat from his eyes, the blond U.N.C.L.E. agent forced his hand harder and harder against the loop of the rope.

And his hand slipped out!

Quickly he freed his other hand and bent to the ropes on his feet. Moments later he stood and rubbed the circulation back into his legs.

Now he had to hurry. The stimulant drug would begin to wear off soon, and when it wore off his brain would give out, his muscles would go limp, his control would slip away, and he would sleep for thirty-six hours.

Moving swiftly, his face set in grim concentration, the small blond agent took off his belt and carefully felt the wide leather band. He drew out a flat foil packet, a thin thread, and a long thin wire. He replaced his belt and bent to his left shoe. From the heel of the shoe he took out a round ball the size of a marble. He stood up and crossed the silent stone cell to the steel door.

Bending close, his shrewd eyes alert under his lowered brow, he inspected the lock. He smiled—a single standard lock. He placed the foil packet on the lock of the door where it stuck with its self-adhesive. He attached the thin thread and rubbed it hard. There was a flash

of flame and Illya leaped back.

The foil packet began to glow white hot, casting an eerie glare in the stone cell that made the shadow of the blond agent loom large against the stone of the walls. Then the glow ceased. Illya moved silently to the door and opened it. There was no guard outside. Illya stepped out, the long wire in his right hand.

The stone tunnel led to the left. At the far end there was a faint light. Illya glided silently toward the light. The tunnel opened into a small stone room with another steel door on the far side. A single guard sat at a rough table in the room. The guard was reading a book, his British Sten gun on the table in front of him.

Illya was across the room to the table in two quick bounds. The guard heard him and grabbed frantically for his Sten gun. The book slithered away across the cold stone floor. Illya had the wire looped around the throat of the guard. The guard fought. Illya hung on grimly as the heavier guard thrashed and fell to the floor on top of the small agent.

Illya tightened the wire, drew it closer around the throat of the struggling guard. His hands thrashing, the guard dropped the Sten gun and clawed behind him for Illya's face. His fingernails raked close to the eyes of the grim Russian.

Then his hands grew weaker, he flailed once more at nothing, and lay still.

Illya released the wire. The man groaned. Illya pressed a spot on the man's neck and the man lay still, unconscious. Illya found the keys on the unconscious man and crossed the silent room to the second door. He opened this door cautiously and found himself in another corridor. He moved down this corridor.

The cave turned out to be not a single unit but a honeycomb of passages and small rooms and larger rooms down side tunnels, where Illya heard activity. A vast maze of caves like the caves of Guam and Okinawa during the Second War, where an army could hide and vanish like wraiths in the wind.

Now the maze came to Illya's aid. By using his ears he was able to move unseen, hiding whenever any of the black-uniformed men approached, their footfalls clear on the stone floor. But the real aid was the narrowness of the tunnels. Through the dark and narrow passages the air moved strongly in a venturi effect, and, by feeling the direction of the air, the blond agent moved steadily toward the exit from the complex of caves.

He saw a faint silver light ahead, a round area of silver darkness, before he was discovered.

He saw the exit and passed a wide side gallery at the same instant. In the gallery men worked. A shout went up. Illya darted a quick glance at the gallery and saw the men in black running toward him. He knew that there would be guards at the entrance. His quick mind saw that he could reach the exit before he was caught, but there would be the guards.

He was dressed all in black.

He took out the tiny marble-sized object and hurled it at the advancing men from the side gallery. There was a flash of flame, a loud explosion, and thick white smoke blocked the men from the gallery. The cloud of white smoke spread with incredible speed. Illya ran shouting toward the exit.

"Attack! Attack! They've broken through! Everyone to the rear!" Illya shouted in perfect Zambalan-English.

His running black figure, the smoke and flame behind him, gave the three guards on the exit no chance to think. They left their position and came running toward him. Illya stopped, urged them on to the rear. They ran passed him, their weapons ready, their eyes on the thick cloud of smoke.

With a grin, Illya watched them run to the rear, turned, and ran on

to the exit. He reached the exit and went out into a moonlit night before he heard the shouts behind him that told him his trick had been discovered.

Outside, he turned once to look back, his eyes narrowed to remember where he was. The cave entrance was camouflaged cleverly, impossible to see from the air or the ground unless you knew it was there.

Directly above the hidden entrance was the tall peak of a mountain. A peak with a little white scar. Illya lined the scar up with a black boulder lower down on the mountain—and he had his line for the cave entrance. Men now came pouring from the camouflaged entrance.

Illya Kuryakin turned and ran off into the jungle.

* * *

SOLO watched the small detector attached to his dashboard with one eye as he drove on into the mountains of Zambala. His other eye alternately watched the road and the truck still behind him. He could lose the truck, but he was more interested in knowing who was in it.

He was almost sure that whoever was driving the truck, and the masked woman, and the men who had attacked him on the hill behind the prison, all belonged to the same group.

But what group?

He wanted to find out, but the first order of business was to locate Illya and free him from whatever was holding him.

Suddenly Solo jammed on his brakes. The detector showed that the trail made a sharp left turn. Solo peered out his window. To the left, perhaps five miles off, he saw a tall mountain with a long white scar just below the summit. A narrow track led off toward the mountain.

Quickly checking the truck behind him—it was closer now—Solo turned his car and plunged into the narrow track. The going was hard; the car bounced from ruts and deep holes in the narrow track. But there were tire marks in his headlights; some vehicle had come this way. Where another vehicle could go, Solo could go!

Behind him he heard a squeal of brakes and the grinding of gears as the truck tried to follow him. He did not think the truck could move as fast on this narrow road, but he hoped that they kept coming. He turned his attention back to negotiating the murderous road. Then he jammed on his brakes again.

He listened in the moonlit night.

Far ahead there were shouts and the distant sound of men running through the jungle.

Solo jumped out of his car and began to run along the track, his U.N.C.L.E. Special set for automatic and fitted, as he ran, with its stock and hand grip. He listened to the sounds ahead and behind. The truck was battling the road but com-

ing closer slowly. The men ahead were rapidly closing in.

A twig broke in the jungle to Solo's right.

He heard the click of a stone.

Crouching low, Solo circled through the jungle toward the sounds. Ahead, in the gloom of the moonlit night in the jungle, he saw a sudden movement. Solo hit the dirt and crawled ahead toward where he had seen the movement. In front of him a bush moved. He crawled closer. A face emerged from the bush directly in front of him, not more than inches away.

"Well, Napoleon," Illya said, "you took your time getting here."

Solo sighed. "You'll never learn to wait, will you? If you don't stop rescuing yourself, I may give up my rescues."

"I can't depend on you, Napoleon. You're so slow."

"But steady," Solo said. "I mean, I'm here."

"Yes," Illya said, "and why are we lying on our faces?"

"I heard you," Solo said.

"And I heard you," Illya said.

"Perhaps we could stand up now," Solo said.

"I had the same thought," Illya said.

The two agents stood up. Solo passed Illya his small spare automatic. Toward the mountains the sound of pursuit was closer. Toward the road the sound of the truck echoed in the night. Illya looked at Solo.

"You brought some company," Illya said.

"That I did," Solo said. "I presume they will now join your friends."

"It is a distinct possibility," Illya said. "I'd prefer not to be sandwiched in the middle."

"Wait!" Solo said.

The two agents listened in the moonlit night. The sound of the truck had changed. There was a sharp grinding of gears and the truck sounds began to move away. The two agents listened until they were certain. The truck was going away.

"Your friends do not seem to be friends with my friends," Illya said.

"It would appear that way," Solo said.

"Then I suggest we give that some thought while we make our escape," Illya said.

"Good thinking," Solo said. "Now?"

Illya listened to the sounds of pursuit coming much closer.

"Now," Illya said.

The two agents ran through the jungle and emerged on the rutted narrow track beside Solo's car. It was the work of seconds to turn the car and drive as fast as the narrow track allowed toward the main road.

There were distant shots in the night as they reached the main road and roared away, leaving the black-uniformed pursuers shooting at shadows.

THREE

BEFORE THEY reached San Pablo again, Illya had told his story. Solo had reported what had happened to him.

"I think Mr. Smith was the beggar I followed," Illya said.

"The man with the thin beard has to be Max Steng himself," Solo said.

"Then my captors *were* the Stengali," Illya said, "and they appeared to be mystified by the events at The Morgan House."

"Which could be a smoke screen," Solo said. "Or Tavvi could have been working on his own. Or Tavvi could have been working with someone else without Max Steng's knowledge."

"Check," Illya said. "But who are your friends? Who is the woman who probably killed Tembo? They dress almost exactly like the Stengali, but they did not seem anxious to meet the Stengali."

"Suppose we find some food and some beds. Tomorrow I see what I can do about that woman," Solo said.

"While I have a session with O'Hara," Illya said. "He may know something about the woman and her companions."

In San Pablo the two agents went straight to the hotel room O'Hara had arranged for them. For once they slept undisturbed.

By nine o'clock the next morning Solo and Illya were in the hidden calm of the miniature U.N.C.L.E. headquarters behind the bookcase in the mansion on the hill that overlooked San Pablo.

O'Hara listened to their reports. The local Section II man agreed that Illya had been captured by the Stengali. He could not guess who the pursuers of Solo were.

"Unless it is some men imported by Zamyatta," O'Hara said, "which is a possibility. There have been reports of bands of unidentified men in the hills. All across the island, in fact. There have been other killings. Mura Khan and the attempt on Premier Roy were only the latest. Premier Roy has made some documents available to the Tribunal that seem to implicate Zamyatta with the Stengali.

"But Chairman Ramirez wants to move carefully. Zamyatta has many followers. We must be sure or the country could explode, and you know what that would mean down here. The Dominican Republic affair is bad enough, but here—"

"What about this woman, Jezzi Mahal?" Solo said. "And what is The Silver Dunes?"

O'Hara frowned. "You're sure of that name?"

"I'm quite sure," Solo said. "Why?"

O'Hara sighed. "Jezzi Mahal is a wealthy and very high and mighty young lady. Jet-set, social, and her father was my father's only rival as the richest businessman in Zambala. She has been seen often with

certain important army officers."

"And The Silver Dunes?"

"Her beach *cabana*. She spends the summer there. She would be there now. It is a few miles out of San Pablo, on the south coast. What we Zambalans call our Riviera."

"Which Army officers?" Illya asked.

"Primarily Colonel Julio Brown, who just happens to command the second motorized regiment," O'Hara said. "Our only fully-trained and crack regiment. The first regiment is largely made up of ceremonial units based in San Pablo. The third, fourth, and fifth are all garrisoned at various parts of the island, and are rarely in full training. The second motorized regiment is stationed ten miles from San Pablo, is always in full training."

There was a silence in the soundproof, hidden room in the heart of O'Hara's mansion. Illya broke the silence.

"In short, if anyone wanted to take over Zambala, it would be good to have Colonel Julio Brown on his side," Illya said.

"I'm afraid that is it," O'Hara said.

Solo nodded thoughtfully. "Well then, I think I had better have a talk with Miss Jezzi Mahal."

"And I will do a little reading on the background of Colonel Julio Brown, Max Steng and Jemi Zamyatta," Illya said.

"Have fun," Solo said.

The handsome, boyish agent raised an eyebrow and walked from the room. In the corridor, he took time to look into the other rooms in search of the fine female voice he had talked to over his radio. He found her at her communications desk.

Her stare was withering as he smiled at her.

Solo departed.

The Silver Dunes was a *cabana* in name only. A vast, low, ranch house on a small cliff at the edge of the dazzlingly blue sea, it spread far and wide and must have contained at least twenty rooms. There was movement in the two rooms that faced the wide open terrace and the sea.

On the beach below the small cliff people lay on the sand in the afternoon sun, and swam in bursts of white in the blue sea.

Solo parked his car on the edge of the highway above the house and out of sight from the house. There was a wide gravel drive down and around from the coast highway to the house below on its low cliff. Solo decided on the short route down the sandy hills. He slid and skidded swiftly but silently down, and approached the house itself from a deep gully in the sandy earth.

At the corner of the house Solo paused. His keen eyes were puzzled. There was no sound from inside the house. He could see directly into one of the two rooms

that faced the terrace. The room was empty. Solo moved closer. But again, he paused before he reached the house.

Something else was odd, wrong.

Then he knew what it was. There was no sound at all.

There were no voices from the beach below. This close he should have heard something down there, where the people plunged in the surf. He turned quickly and walked to the edge of the cliff in front of the house.

The beach below was empty.

Solo turned and looked back at the silent house. There had been someone in the house when he looked down from the road. He had watched the house the whole way down and no one had left. But there was no movement in the house now and no one on the beach. Had he been seen?

It looked very much that way, but the U.N.C.L.E. agent had to investigate more closely. He recrossed the terrace to the house itself. Using a small picklock, he unlocked the french doors and went in. He stood for a time in the large living room and listened. Then he moved on into the house and came to a small study. A picture of a man in a colonel's uniform stood on the desk.

Solo began to search the room. In a bottom drawer of the desk he found a secret compartment. In the compartment there was an envelope. In the envelope there was a

series of dates and the signature: *Z*. Napoleon Solo stared at the list and the scrawled *Z*. One of the dates was the day the Security Chief Mura Khan had been killed. and the premier had shot the Stengali!

The light step came from the living room.

Solo quickly replaced the list in the compartment and closed the drawer. He glided into the corner of the room behind the door. The woman stepped into the study.

She was a beautiful woman, dark and exotic. She wore a deep red dress that left none of her curves hidden. Her hair was long and she wore earrings to her shoulders. But she could have been the masked woman in black who had killed Tembo.

She turned and stared straight at Solo. The agent grinned.

"Miss Mahal, I presume?" Solo said.

The woman showed no expression. "Who are you? What do you want here?"

"Who I am isn't important," Solo said. "What I want here is to return your matches."

He held out the matchbook. The beautiful woman looked at the matchbook. She stepped to Solo, took the matchbook, and dropped it onto the desk. Her green eyes stared at Solo.

"I don't recall giving you any matches."

"No," Solo said. "You forgot them. I hate to see a lady without her matches."

"Forgot them?"

"When you called on Inspector Tembo."

Solo watched for any sign of surprise, or any other sign. Jezzi Mahal showed nothing. The beautiful woman was either very innocent or very controlled.

"Inspector Tembo? I'm afraid I don't know the inspector very well. I certainly haven't seen him in months. And now, will you leave, or must I call for help?"

"You wouldn't really?" Solo said. "After all, I returned your matches. They could have been awkward."

"Awkward?" the woman said. "Because Tembo was murdered? Really, whoever you are, do you know how many of those matchbooks I have? How many people take them from my house?"

"How did you know Tembo was dead?"

Jezzi Mahal laughed. "I have many friends. The inspector's murder happened last night. Zambala is a small country. Now, must I become obnoxious?"

"I'll bet you could," Solo said.

"I could and will."

"I'll bet you'd even get me in trouble with Zamyatta," Solo said.

For the first time the woman showed a reaction. Almost imperceptibly her eyes glanced toward her desk, toward the drawer with the hidden compartment. She recovered so quickly Solo could almost have believed he had not startled her into the glance. But he had seen the faint motion.

"Mr. Zamyatta and I are not exactly friends," Jezzi Mahal said.

Solo raised a surprised eyebrow. "No? How stupid of me, I meant Colonel Brown. The man in the picture there."

"The colonel is not a man to have for an enemy, whoever you may be," Jezzi Mahal said. "If you wish him for an enemy, it can be arranged."

"I'll bet it could," Solo said. "I better leave, hadn't I?"

"I strongly suggest it."

Solo grinned again and left the woman in the study. He walked easily across the living room, opened the doors—and closed them again.

He jumped back into the cover of a large chair and crouched low. Unseen, he saw the woman come to the study door, look, and immediately go back. He heard her lift the receiver of the telephone.

Solo moved quickly to the doors again, opened them silently this time, and went out. He ran across the terrace and into the gully in the sand hills. He climbed up the hills to his car as fast as he could.

At the edge of the highway he looked carefully in all directions. People were on the beach again—men who carried weapons. Other men moved at a run through the sandhills below.

Solo grinned and ran for his car. He jumped in and started the engine. A long, black car appeared up the highway from the direction of San Pablo. It was coming fast. Solo threw his car into gear and drove off away from San Pablo.

The black car did not stop at The Silver Dunes. It came on at a fast pace.

Ahead there was a curve. Solo went around the curve and swerved off the road into a side road the instant the black car was hidden behind him. Moments later a jeep came around the bend from the opposite direction. The jeep and the black car raced together, passed, and both screeched to a halt. The two cars backed toward each other.

The man in uniform in the jeep looked up at the hills and at the side road. Two men jumped from the black car. The three men all looked at the side road.

Solo got out of his car, where he had parked it out of sight from the highway, but from where he could watch the road. He checked his U.N.C.L.E. Special and plunged silently into the bushes. He worked his way down the hillside.

On the highway the three men drew guns and started up the side road. They moved swiftly but warily. Hidden, Solo let them pass, and then worked the rest of the way down to the highway.

The man left in the black car neither saw nor heard Solo creep up on him. Not until the agent was almost on top of him. Then the man heard. turned, raised an ugly-looking Luger. Solo shot him in the neck with a sleep dart from his Special. The man collapsed.

Up on the side road there were loud voices. They had found his empty car. Solo leaped into the jeep. The keys were still in it. The three men were still running down the side road when he drove away in the jeep.

Solo raced back along the highway toward San Pablo. As he approached the gravel drive down to the beach house of Jezzi Mahal, he saw the men all across the road. Armed men. Solo bent low and pretended to slow the jeep. The men opened a path. Solo jammed down on the gas and the jeep leaped forward, through, and past the men.

He drove on, crouched low, but

no shots came. He raised up and looked back. The black car was coming. Napoleon Solo grinned, they would not catch him now.

But someone was worried about what he might have found at The Silver Dunes!

FOUR

THE INTERNATIONAL TRIBUNAL held the special session in the San Pablo presidential palace, the former palace of the governor general. All members were there. Martin O'Hara held the floor.

"I am sorry to have to tell you, gentlemen, but I have definite indications that Opposition Leader Zamyatta, the Stengali, and Colonel Julio Brown of the second regiment appear to be involved in some form of plot!"

There was a hubbub in the ornate room that had once held the glitter of colonial pomp. The two Western members, and the Zambalan labor leader, Mark Boya, nodded their agreement with O'Hara. The Pole and the Indian demanded to know what kind of indications O'Hara had, demanded that he produce his evidence.

Carlos Ramirez listened for a time, and then banged for order. The room fell silent.

"If this is true, we must act. If it is true, I will call in the Organization of American States. But I agree that we must know what proof we have."

The tall old man glared like a lion around the table in the elegant room. His thick shock of white hair seemed to dominate them all. His strong, alert eyes flashed from face to face in the silent room. He pounded his cane harshly against the floor.

"I repeat, gentlemen, we must have proof!" Ramirez said in a voice that had lost none of its power. "I have perhaps more than anyone to lose in this island if Zamyatta should come to power in a coup, but I will not let my personal business blind me to justice and the will of the people."

The old poet and patriot glared around him. Then he faced O'Hara.

"What exactly is your information, O'Hara?"

O'Hara hesitated. All the proof he had was the possible murder of Tembo by the Mahal woman, the list in her desk that he could not produce, and the experiences of Illya and Solo.

"Very well," and O'Hara told them what he had learned, but without telling them of U.N.C.L.E. He made it sound as if some chance information had come to friends of his.

There was another silence. Ramirez frowned, his craggy old grandee's face set in lines of thought. The Pole and the Indian member sneered.

"None of that can be called proof!" the Pole said.

"We have had many ru-

mors since we came here," the Indian pointed out mildly.

"I say it's enough," Mark Boya, the labor leader said.

"We do have a national crisis to consider," one of the two Western members said.

Ramirez listened, and then the old man spoke. "No, we do not have enough proof to charge Zamyatta and Colonel Brown. What O'Hara tells us is enough to convince me, perhaps, but we must be sure. The future of Zambala is at stake. I suggest that we alert the premier and the deputy premier, and that they quietly prepare all the military units they know to be loyal.

"I suggest we be ready, that we make quiet preparations to protect San Pablo. The deputy premier will know what to do. But we must make no move, no public announcement until we have more proof to show the world."

The members of the tribunal looked at each other. There was a general nodding of heads, all but the Polish member, who frowned. Ramirez smiled.

"Good," Ramirez said. "By tomorrow, I hope we will know more. The future of much more than Zambala is at stake."

In a small room at the other end of the presidential palace, Illya and Solo sat at a table and leaned over a small radio receiver. O'Hara had his set open, and the two agents had listened to the entire discussion. Now Illya looked up.

"He is a hard man to convince, Napoleon."

"He is that," Solo said.

"Still, he may be right. We don't really know yet what they plan to do," Illya said.

"Then I suggest we find out," Solo said.

"My thought exactly," Illya said.

"The second regiment?" Solo asked.

"That seems the most likely place. It is very hard to hide the movements of a regiment," Illya agreed.

"Shall we go?"

The two agents left the small room and went down the wide corridors of the palace. They left the building by a secret entrance known only to O'Hara—a special precaution of the U.N.C.L.E. team in San Pablo.

They emerged through the thick bushes around the palace on its wide, park-like grounds. On another hill above the city, the two agents could see the night lights of San Pablo below.

They moved quickly to Solo's stolen jeep, drove down the wide ceremonial Mall that led from the palace to the highway into San Pablo.

They reached a point where the highway into the city curved high and close to the sea. The sea itself was far below, the lights of the city directly ahead. A low wall separated the road from the rocks high above the sea, and on the far side of

the jagged rocks there was a sheer drop.

It was at this spot that the shots rang out.

Solo felt the jeep go. It bucked and slewed across the highway, both front tires shot out. Solo fought to hold control. The jeep hurtled down the road, careening from side to side of the road. Twice they bounced off the low wall without going over.

At last Solo brought the jeep to a stop against the wall above the sea. The two agents did not pause to feel lucky or to catch their breath. They were out of the jeep, over the parapet, and crouching behind the parapet on the rocks above the sheer drop before the jeep had stopped vibrating from the impact.

Across the highway, from among the trees on the vast grounds of the presidential palace, men moved down to the highway. A dozen men in uniform. It was a uniform the two agents had not seen until now, a regular army uniform. British-made khaki shorts, high socks and heavy black boots, khaki shirts and light brown berets.

The men coming after the two agents were regular soldiers!

"What do you think?" Illya said.

Solo looked over the wall. "I'd have a guess that that patch on their shoulders belongs to the second motorized regiment."

"My thought exactly." Illya said. "The Mahal girl?"

"It has that feeling," Solo said.

"Or someone on the tribunal," Illya said.

"Don't even say it," Solo said.

"I'll say something more to the point."

"And that would be?"

"How do we get out of here?" Illya said.

Solo looked at the soldiers, who had reached the highway now, then down at the sea breaking angry on the rocks far below. Then he looked to the right, where the wall and the cliff joined a few yards away and left nothing but open space for birds all the way down. Then he looked left—to the left there was enough room to walk, and ledges of rocks leading down. It was a way for goats, but it was the only way.

"Left," Solo said, "and fast."

Crouched below the wall, the two agents moved as fast as they could to the left. They peered over the wall in the night to see where the soldiers were. The soldiers had reached the jeep and found it empty. Now the soldiers came running down the road. Illya opened fire. The soldiers went to ground and began to fire back. The fire was high over the agent's heads.

Solo led the way along the narrow cliff, then down to the first ledge. But the going was too slow.

"I'll have to hold them," Illya cried. "You go on!"

Illya leaped back up to the wall. Resting his Special on the parapet, he opened fire. Solo continued on down, ledge to ledge, as fast as he could, but it was very slowly. Above, Illya continued his covering fire until the soldiers, well-trained and skilled, worked around and had him covered from two sides.

Halfway down the cliff Solo looked up and saw Illya stand with his hands up. The soldiers swarmed around Illya. But they did not give up with the capture of one man. Leaning over the parapet they opened fire on Solo, called on him to surrender. Their shots were still too high, but Solo was pinned against the cliff ledge. He looked down.

Below, the water seemed deep. He could see no rocks. At the next fusillade Solo cried out, clutched his chest, and let himself fall over the edge of the ledge down into the sea.

Above, the soldiers turned away with their prisoner.

The night became silent.

Below in the water nothing moved.

ACT III
COUP, COUP, WHO'S GOT THE COUP?

THE SEA outside the harbor of San Pablo is an angry one. It breaks against the cliffs and deserted beaches that curve out toward the sea itself until the beaches reach the opening into the harbor.

Inside the fine harbor the water is calm and sheltered, and anyone who swims does so on the harbor side. On the sea side, below the cliffs and on the beaches there is

nothing but the surf and the flotsam of the sea.

This night, on one of the empty beaches below the cliff road, among the driftwood and seaweed, something rose from the white water, staggered, and fell again. The figure struggled up, falling and rising, until it lay beyond the reach of the surf on the silent beach. The figure was Napoleon Solo, bruised and half drowned.

After a time, Solo raised his head and looked around. The beach was as deserted as it had seemed. Nothing at all moved in the night. From time to time a car passed high on the road above the beach and the cliffs. Solo stood up. He checked his arms and legs, but there were only bruises. Nothing was broken by the rocks.

It was time to go to work.

Aware that when a coup threatened you could not afford to trust anyone, Solo walked the miles from the beach to the mansion of O'Hara above the city. He hid whenever a car passed. It was close to morning by the time he staggered into the mansion, and, behind the bookcase in the silent rooms of U.N.C.L.E. in Zambala, told the story to O'Hara.

"What do you want to do?" O'Hara asked.

"Go after Illya. Do you know what the insignia of the second regiment looks like?"

O'Hara went to a filing cabinet and took out a folder. He showed Solo a picture. It was the insignia worn by the soldiers who had attacked on the cliff road. Solo nodded.

"Right, then I'm going to their camp. Are they in their regular camp?"

"At Tidworth Barracks, ten miles northeast on the Real Plain," O'Hara said. "You want help?"

"No, we can't tip U.N.C.L.E.'s hand yet, and your men might be known," Solo said. "I'll just need a car."

"Take the small Triumph. It's equipped. Smoke, extra guns, bombs in the usual places, supercharged for extra speed."

"Right," Solo said.

Ten minutes later the powerful little Triumph was on the road into the mountains again. Napoleon Solo drove swiftly with the sun up and bright over the tall blue mountains. The small car ate up the ten miles. A sign on the side of the road told Solo that Tidworth was one mile ahead. He drove more carefully.

His sharp eyes began to notice things. There were troops in the fields on both sides of the road—troops and vehicles in full battle dress. On the sides of the mountains there were flashes that showed high observation posts. Small planes flew over from time to time as if reconnoitering the area.

These were not the normal activities of a regiment in barracks.

Solo continued to drive. Ahead he saw a roadblock. He eased the

Triumph up to the wire. Four soldiers watched him. A sergeant stepped up to check his papers. Solo handed him the specially-prepared papers that identified him as George Solo, uniform salesman from New York.

"And why are you here, sir?" the sergeant asked.

"To sell uniforms, naturally," Solo said with a smile.

"Really? The colonel made no mention of a uniform salesman visiting the barracks today."

"Ah, yes. Well, the colonel doesn't know. I, ah, just decided to visit Zambala's best regiment to see if I could find a few, shall we say, flaws in the present uniforms."

"On your own, sir?"

"Ah, yes, all my own little idea," Solo said with a dazzling smile. "Of course, the premier knows I'm here."

"I see, sir. Very good. Then I'm sure the colonel will welcome you."

Solo eased the Triumph into reverse. "Well, as a matter of fact I can see that you're busy, so I think I'll just come back some other time."

The sergeant nodded to his men. They stood around the Triumph with their rifles pointed very accurately at Solo's chest.

The sergeant nodded again, this time to Solo.

"I know you want to see the colonel. Such a long trip, you don't want to leave empty-handed, I'm sure."

Solo looked at the rifles and got out of the car.

* * *

ILLYA lay on the floor of the room. He was not tied, and the room had a window. Looking out, he could see the grounds of the complex of buildings, and the soldiers walking across the grounds. But the window was barred, and three stories up with no holds to the ground.

Where he lay he considered what had happened. After his capture there had been the trip in the truck guarded by the soldiers. The arrival at what was obviously a barracks station of some regiment, and his delivery to an officer, who promptly locked him in this room. Papers had been handed to the officer. The officer had treated him well, but refused to listen to him.

Ever since then he had been fed regularly. He was not bound or chained, no one had bothered him or questioned him. He was simply being held in what was clearly a guardroom just like any military prisoner.

Illya Kuryakin was puzzled.

The soldiers who had attacked Solo and himself had shot at them, literally kidnaped him. Yet when they arrived with him here at the barracks they had handed him over with papers as if he were a prisoner being transferred. They kidnaped him by force, yet treated him more like a prisoner of war.

They had not even searched him

or taken away his watch, belt, rings, shoes or clothes. They had fed him well; he had seen no one but the soldier who brought his food since he had arrived. No one kept him from looking out the window—and from the window he could clearly see the preparations.

Preparations for a regimental move of some kind. The signs were obvious.

He went again to the barred window. The signs were still there—kits being inspected, soldiers cleaning weapons on the quadrangle, vehicles being checked and gassed across the quadrangle in the motor pool, boxes of ammunition and large shells for the tanks opened and stacked ready to be issued.

Until now Illya had made no attempt to escape because he wanted to see why they had captured him. But nothing had happened, and the regiment was moving close to readiness. Soon he would have to make a move.

He was thinking this when he saw Napoleon Solo.

The blond agent came alert. He watched as the soldiers marched Solo across the quadrangle toward the same building Illya was in. There was no doubt that Solo was under guard. The same polite guard as Illya had had himself. Illya turned from the window.

He crossed the room, checked the door. There was a soldier stationed directly outside! Frowning, Illya recrossed to the window. He could easily melt the bars, and lower himself on the hair-thin spool of wire hidden in the third button of his jacket. But there were soldiers all over the quadrangle; this part of the building was in clear view of hundreds of them.

Illya rubbed his hand through his shock of blond hair and began to study the walls of the room. The barracks were built of fieldstone, but the interior walls were normal lath and plaster. What was on the other side of the one wall that did not face the hall? He could break through; only to find himself in another cell!

No, this was a matter for trickery. The guard outside probably had orders to never enter a cell himself, but to call the corporal of the guard in any emergency. If he feigned sickness, even death, the guard would probably simply call for the corporal, unless he could panic the fellow, which would not be easy. This was a crack unit, its men would be trained and veterans.

Somehow, he had to panic the guard and silence him before he could summon the corporal.

He looked around the room again and he saw the wash basin. Illya began to smile. A standard wash basin with hot and cold faucets and a stopper. The sink was very close to the door. Illya smiled more. There was something a lot better than panic—curiosity and uncertainty!

The fear of looking foolish!

There was a weapon! Illya studied the room and the door. The door opened inward, with the wash basin on the side of the room hidden by the door. The guard would come in, slowly, not running, and look carefully around the door. Illya would have no more than a second or two, and he could not allow the guard to make a sound.

Illya took off his wristwatch, opened the back, and took out the small capsule—a tiny plastic capsule wrapped in some kind of netting.

Then he went to the sink, put the stopper in the bowl, and started both faucets running, but not too fast, just filling the bowl without making a great deal of noise. He stood at the sink until the water began to run over and flow down to the floor and across the floor toward the door.

Then he stood just behind the door, the capsule ready, and waited.

He watched the small stream of water flow inexorably to the door, under it. He waited. Another minute passed, two minutes . . . three. The water flowed thin under the door. Four minutes. The water flowed slowly, a thin and wide stream going out under the door.

Then Illya heard the guard move. He heard the low, muttered exclamation. Behind the door the small blond agent grinned. He could picture the soldier standing outside the door, staring at the stream of water. He could imagine the soldier looking around as if to ask what to do.

The soldier would look again at the water. Illya Kuryakin heard steps as the guard came to the door and listened. Now the guard stepped back. Curiosity and uncertainty was gripping him. What should he do about this? Call the corporal? For a water leak? Have the corporal come running with two more men—to find a puddle of water?

The guard moved to the door. "You in there! What's that water?"

Illya remained silent. He heard the guard shift his feet. Then there was the sound of the key in the lock. Illya grinned. As he had expected, the guard was not going to call for the corporal for a water leak. The door opened slowly.

Illya moved with it, silently.

The door opened all the way and the guard peered around and saw the sink. The guard blinked, turned his head to look for Illya. In that split second Illya thrust the capsule in the face of the guard and squeezed.

A jet of gas spat into the face of the guard. He took a half step backward and collapsed without a sound.

Illya caught the guard and his rifle, lowered them to the floor, jumped and closed the door, and ran to turn off the water. He stripped the guard and dressed in the guard's clothes. He took the

guard's rifle and keys. He stepped to the door, opened it, stepped out, closed and locked the door behind him.

He was free in the corridor, in disguise, and the guard would be out for at least two hours—all done in a matter of a minute and twenty seconds. There was no one else in sight, and Illya began to walk carefully along the third floor corridor. He was in search of Colonel Julio Brown.

TWO

HIS FACE hidden, Illya Kuryakin moved along the corridors and down the stairs until he located the office of Colonel Julio Brown. The office had two guards stationed outside it. Illya turned away, and climbed back to the second floor and the room directly above the office of the colonel.

This room was empty now. Illya went to the window and looked out. He was in luck. The wall of the next building came close to the main building at this point. The space between was hidden from any observation. Directly below the window of the room there was another window, the colonel's office.

Illya took out his spool of hair-thin wire, made a loop at the bottom for his hands, a loop five and a half feet from the end for his feet, attached the wire to a pipe in the room, and lowered himself out the window head first until his eyes were at a level with the top of the window below.

Inside the office there were two men. Illya, hanging head down in the narrow space between the buildings, recognized one man by his description from O'Hara's briefing, and by his colonel's uniform. The other man had his back turned. He was a short man, but heavy, almost as broad as he was tall. A man with the back and shoulders of a bull.

This second man, who was dressed in civilian clothes, seemed to be arguing with Colonel Brown. Then the colonel began to talk, emphasizing his points by tapping a short trench knife on his desk. The short, bull-like man turned away from the colonel and faced the window. Illya saw the two long scars on his dark face. He recognized Jemi Zamyatta!

The leader of Zambala's opposition turned back to Colonel Brown, spread his arms, walked close to the colonel. Zamyatta seemed to smile as he talked. The colonel listened, began to nod in slow agreement. Zamyatta put his bear-like arm around the shoulders of the colonel. Both men began to laugh.

Illya watched, and saw both men look at the door. The colonel spoke and a soldier came in and saluted. The soldier, a sergeant made some report. The colonel nodded. The soldier left. The colonel spoke again to Zamyatta, and the bull-like man nodded and walked to a second door. Zamyatta left the room.

The colonel spoke again. His other door opened and the sergeant came back—with Napoleon Solo!

Hanging in the narrow space, Illya watched the colonel offer Solo a cigarette. Then the colonel began to ask questions. Illya could not hear, but from the movement of the colonel's mouth the questions were sharp and not friendly. Illya hauled himself up to the second floor and climbed back into the room above the colonel's office.

He untied the wire, looped it around the pipe, took his hand-hold this time at the end of the now double strand of wire, took the rifle in his other hand, and lowered himself again out the window. He lowered feet first until he stood against the wall just above the window. Then he kicked off with his feet, swung out in the narrow space, and swung back through the window.

He crashed into the office in a shower of glass, straightened in the air from his crouch, and landed on his feet with his rifle covering the colonel. Solo jumped behind the outer door.

The door burst open and two guards came running in. Solo leaped on them from behind and dropped both with sharp blows to the neck. He bent and scooped up their weapons.

"The window!" Solo cried.

Illya Kuryakin squeezed his tiny capsule under the nose of the colonel. The colonel slumped to the floor.

Illya whirled and followed Solo to the window. The two agents climbed through and out into the narrow space between the buildings. They ran between the buildings in the direction away from the quadrangle. They reached where the buildings ended. Ahead was a wide parade ground and then a fence; beyond it the trees of the jungle rose up on the side of a mountain.

"We have to reach the fence," Illya said.

"They're busy enough," Solo said, and pointed to the left out on the open parade ground. Two platoons of soldiers had their kit spread out on the ground. The men were preparing for a move.

"Too busy," Illya said, and told

Solo about Zamyatta and all the preparations he had seen.

"Yes, I noticed," Solo said. "They've got the area sealed. They're all ready for something. Brown wanted very much to know how come the premier had given me permission to come up here. He didn't act like he believed me, but he was very interested."

"He probably thinks we're working for Premier Roy," Illya said. "They treated me very well, but wanted me out of the way."

Solo peered out. The soldiers were in no hurry to leave the field. Solo handed his rifle to Illya.

"Walk me out as if I were a visiting fireman with an escort," Solo said. "Maybe they won't notice."

"It's as good a way as any," Illya said. "If they raise the hue and cry, sprint for the fence."

Solo stepped out and began to walk nonchalantly across the open parade ground. Illya walked a pace behind him as if either escorting or guarding. Solo looked around with great interest as if he was inspecting. They reached the middle of the field without attracting any notice.

A few soldiers looked up, but, like all soldiers preparing for some move, they had little interest in a civilian being escorted on some inspection by one of their men.

In this fashion, Illya and Solo nearly reached the fence. Then two things happened. There was a shout and men running from the direction of the headquarters building. And a sergeant with the men preparing their gear turned at the shout and saw Solo. It was the sergeant who had picked him up at the road block.

"Run!" Illya cried.

Abandoning all pretense, the two agents sprinted for the fence that was close now. The sergeant shouted at his men. The men dropped what they were doing, picked up their weapons, and came after the two agents.

The other pursuers were farther behind.

"The ones packing won't have rounds in their guns!" Solo said.

"I hope you're right!" Illya panted.

Solo was right. The closest pursuers did not have ammunition. Illya and Solo hit the fence in strong leaps, vaulted up and scrambled over. On the other side they plunged into the jungle, just as the soldiers with ammunition came into range.

Shots whistled through the trees and brush, but none hit, and the two agents ran on through the jungle and up on the side of the mountain.

After a time there was no sound of pursuit from behind. Solo sighed.

"Well, they seem to have given up."

"I doubt it, Napoleon," Illya said drily. "Look."

The small blond Russian pointed up and ahead. High on the mountain the sunlight flashed from some-

thing—something that moved up there.

"Binoculars, and trained right on us," Illya said.

"An observation post," Solo agreed. "The mountains are full of them."

"The troops are very alert. It seems obvious why," Illya said. "There!"

To the left a cloud of dust had risen into a sky above the jungle. On the mountain the flashes from the observation post became regular.

"Vehicles on a dirt road through here," Solo said.

"And the post is signaling them. About us, no doubt," Illya said.

The two agents watched the dust moving closer in the sky. Then an observation plane flew low overhead, a face looking down. To the right there was a sudden rumbling in the distance.

Illya Kuryakin and Napoleon Solo began to trot ahead, still going up the mountain toward the observation post.

THREE

THE GAME of hide and seek went on all the rest of the day. A deadly game of hounds and hares, and Illya and Solo were the hares.

The two agents made their way though the thick jungle and up the side of the mountain. Once they crossed the dirt road just minutes before an armored car came slowly along, its turret aimed into the jungle, the officer in the turret scanning the vegetation on both sides.

Once they lay under thick growth as a squad of soldiers on foot passed within a few yards.

Once they crouched in a shadowed hollow in the mountain, their fingers on their triggers, as another squad that had almost surprised them passed within a few feet.

They eluded their pursuers all the rest of the day, but they were unable to escape. They were pushed steadily south and west, higher into the mountains and farther from San Pablo.

They climbed over the first mountains and down into the valley beyond and up the slopes of the next mountains.

"We're being herded like cattle, Napoleon," Illya said. "I don't like it very much."

"Yes," Solo said, gazing up and away to the south and east. "They know what they are doing. I'd say that we are being moved deeper into the wilderness."

"I hope that is all," Illya said.

"All?"

"I hope we are not being pushed into some real trap. They know this country and we don't."

"All this proves one thing anyway—the colonel surely doesn't want us to report to the tribunal!" Solo said. "He must have most of the regiment after us."

"You always look on the bright side," Illya said. "Which brings me

to the conclusion that we had better find a way to get back."

"Yes, I'd say it was about time we stopped being pushed," Solo agreed.

Without another word, the two agents turned, checked their weapons, and began to move carefully back toward the ring of troops pursuing them so relentlessly.

It was almost night when they found the opening.

It was a deep and narrow canyon in the space between two mountain peaks high up. They had spotted a light tank on the outer slope of the left mountain, and a squad of foot soldiers on the outer slope of the right mountain. In between there was this narrow canyon, deep and shadowed.

"Shall we try it?" Illya said.

"They can't cover everywhere," Solo said. "It's too steep on both sides. If we run into anyone it couldn't be many."

"Let's go then," Illya said. "It's our best bet."

They plunged cautiously into the narrow canyon.

They were halfway through and still hadn't seen any of the soldiers. They emerged on the other side, climbed up the sides of the canyon to observe. Illya pointed to the soldiers and vehicles in the fading sunlight—the line of troops was now behind them!

"We're through," Illya said.

"Then let's get moving," Solo said. "They'll figure it out sooner or later, then they'll have to make their move."

The two agents slid down to the downward slope of the mountain, moved swiftly off down toward the jungle again. At the base of the mountain they reached, and passed through, a continuation of the narrow canyon. The mouth of the canyon opened into the flat land of the jungle that stretched unbroken toward the sea and San Pablo.

It also opened into the trap!

As Illya and Solo came out of the canyon they saw the troops facing them. There were troops up on each side of the small canyon. Troops moved down from the mountain behind them.

For a long minute they stood there. Ahead, behind his troops, they saw the colonel himself. They had been neatly lured into a trap. The two agents glanced at each other and prepared to make one last attempt to escape.

At that instant the firing exploded all around them!

Firing from the jungle, from the mountain, *behind* the troops!

Illya and Solo dove for cover. They began to open fire with their own puny weapons. But it was enough. Caught between two fires, the troops broke and ran for cover. Four men dressed in ragged black uniforms appeared from nowhere and leaped down the canyon side to Illya and Solo.

"Quick! They will be back!"

Solo and Illya did not stop to ar-

gue. They scrambled up the side of the canyon with their rescuers. They all went over the crest and ran down into the jungle. They ran perhaps a quarter of a mile. Behind them there was firing again as the regiment had regrouped and was coming on again. The ragged rescuers did not even look back, but ran through the jungle with Illya and Solo.

They reached a small clearing. From all sides ragged men in black uniforms were pouring from the jungle into the clearing. Illya faced the leader of the four who had rescued them.

"We can make it alone now. We have to reach San Pablo."

The ragged man in the black uniform raised his weapon, snapped an order. The ragged men stood all around Illya and Solo with their weapons levelled.

"You go nowhere. You are our prisoners!"

Illya and Solo looked slowly around at all the rescuers who now pointed their weapons.

Hours passed, and it was dark night, when the march ended in a box canyon among the mountains. Illya and Solo, their weapons once again taken from them, marched into the box canyon and saw the two men seated on boulders and waiting for them.

One of the men was Mr. Smith! The other was the small, wiry man with the thin wisp of beard on his chin. This bearded man waved the two agents to seats on other stones. His large, deep eyes stared at them. Illya nodded at the two men with a weary recognition. Solo stared at the small, wiry man with the wisp of beard.

"Steng!" Solo said softly. "Max Steng!"

"You know me, sir," Steng said. "Yes, I am Max Steng. Now I must know who you are."

The bearded Stengali leader looked at Illya Kuryakin. "We captured your friend once before, but he escaped us most ingeniously. You two are not local agents. You belong to some larger group. The OAS perhaps? United States CIA?"

Mr. Smith leaned and whispered to Steng. Steng nodded, his fanatic's eyes on Illya Kuryakin.

"Mr. Smith suggests there is much more than meets the eye about you two. You, the taller one, are obviously an American. The small, blond one is not American. Mr. Smith says that he mumbled in Russian when we had him earlier. What organization employs American and Russians together? Perhaps Interpol?"

"No," Mr. Smith said. "That is a police organization. These men are not policemen."

Steng nodded. "True. Who are you and who sent you to Zambala?"

The two agents sat on their boulders and watched the Stengali leaders. All around the Stengali stood and sat in the box canyon in the jungle night. Illya studied the

bearded guerilla leader from under his brows.

"Perhaps you will tell us why you killed Mura Khan and tried to kill Premier Roy?" Illya said.

Mr. Smith answered. "We did not kill Mura Khan, or try to kill Roy. We gave no such orders."

"Then what were your men doing there?" Solo said.

Max Steng looked at Solo. "That we would also like to know. We want to know how Tavvi got into that room."

"You don't know?" Illya said quickly.

"We do not. Tavvi was in San Pablo on a routine observation. He vanished. The other man, the one arrested at the scene of Mura Khan's death, was supposed to be with Tavvi. Both men vanished. How or why they were where they were we do not know."

Illya and Solo looked at each other. The two Stengali leaders watched them. At last Napoleon Solo turned to Max Steng.

"It appears that someone was out to start trouble, to make it look like the Stengali were ready to begin a civil war," Solo said.

"Why?" Mr. Smith said.

"Obviously to cover a real coup," Illya said.

Max Steng pulled on his wisp of beard. "You were being pursued by the second regiment. They were in full battle gear."

"They were," Solo said.

"Then it is Colonel Brown," Steng said. "But not alone. The colonel is a soldier, a loyal one. He would not attempt a revolt."

"How about with Jemi Zamyatta?" Illya said softly.

Max Steng shook his head.

"It is probable, yet hard to believe. For years I have tried to convince Zamyatta that Roy was hurting the country, that his deals with the West are not for our benefit. Deals that make a few Zambalans rich and the majority poor. He always refused to join me. He always said he was tired of violence."

"We saw him with the colonel," Solo said.

Steng smiled sadly. "What do we do, then? We would not want to stop the ending of Premier Roy. But we would not want to see Zamyatta come to power on a military coup."

Mr. Smith laughed harshly. "We will oppose them all as we have always done! Until Zambala is truly free!"

Smith's voice echoed down the box canyon and a sudden silence fell over the Stengali.

It saved all their lives.

In that sudden silence the falling boulder was heard. The boulder fell down from the rim of the canyon, bouncing from rock to rock loud in the silent night.

FOUR

THE SOUND of the falling boulder was like the end of the world. The Stengali all froze. The rock

bounced down and down and down. Then there was no more noise.

"Move!" Max Steng shouted.

The Stengali moved. They seemed to vanish like wraiths in the night. Silent, barely making a sound, the whole band of swift guerrillas vanished. Solo and Illya followed the two leaders.

In an instant, they were all in among the giant boulders of the box canyon in a move that was obviously so well-trained into the Stengali that it was a reflex action.

From above, on the rim of the canyon, a voice now called down.

"You cannot escape, pigs!"

The Stengali were silent among their rocks.

"We cover both sides, the open end! You are boxed in the canyon. Surrender, dogs!"

On the floor of the canyon no one moved or spoke.

Up on the rim a figure appeared. It shone a light on itself. It was a tall man wearing the uniform of a major. The major stood there with the flashlight in his hand trained on himself.

Nothing happened. Illya and Solo watched upwards. The Stengali could have been a hundred miles away, they were so silent and so unseen from above. The major turned to speak behind him.

"They must have escaped," the major said.

"I think not," a voice said from the dark behind him.

"Such pigs always have an escape route. They would not stay to fight with us," the major said.

"They are down there," the voice said. "I say we use the grenades."

"Coward! Grenades for such pigs? Next you will say send for the artillery!"

"If there was artillery, I would say send for artillery," the hidden voice said.

"I say they have run like the dogs they are, Lieutenant," the major said.

The major still stood there with the flashlight on himself. He looked down at the silent and motionless floor of the box canyon. The major took a step closer to the slope down to the canyon floor.

"Shoot, pigs! Look, I stand here! I have a light! Shoot! Even you must see me! Shoot me, you pigs!"

Nothing moved in the night.

"They are gone," the major said. "No dog of a guerilla could resist shooting at me."

The major began to walk down the slope, the flashlight still held on his arrogant face. In his other hand he held his pistol. He walked slowly down, his eyes alert and jumping from shadow to shadow below on the canyon floor, but his face set in a sneer of courage.

"Look! I defy you! Shoot, pigs!"

The major stepped farther down the slope. Behind the major, faint against the night sky, other heads appeared to watch. Down in the canyon, Illya touched Solo on the shoulder. The small blond nodded

up toward the slowly descending major.

"Napoleon! I know him. He's the tall man in black who was watching the prison the night the Stengali was killed trying to escape! The one who tried to ambush me."

On the slope of the canyon, the tall major continued down. He began to move faster now. His arrogant face broke into a small smile. He had started in bravado, and now it looked like he had been right. The Stengali were gone, and he would make good his display of courage. It would impress his men very much.

"Pig dogs! Where are you? Do you fear one man? Come on, you dogs; shoot if you dare!"

There was neither sound nor movement from the rocks on the canyon floor. The major turned to look up the slope.

Now the hidden lieutenant stood there on the crest.

"You see, they are gone! We would have been up there hiding forever. They cannot have gone far. There must be some way out through the closed end."

"Perhaps you are right, my major," the lieutenant said from above.

The major laughed scornfully. "Men do not say perhaps. Come, there is no danger."

The major turned and walked three more steps down. He was almost on the canyon floor. Illya and Solo sensed the movement to their right. Max Steng rested his rifle on a boulder.

"Pigs!" the major shouted.

The single shot echoed up and down the canyon.

The major pitched forward on his face and skidded down to the bottom of the canyon. He neither moved nor spoke again. Max Steng lowered his rifle.

The second shot killed the wary lieutenant, who had not been as wary as his intelligence had told him to be. The lieutenant rolled halfway down the canyon wall and stuck against a boulder.

"A brave man," Max Steng said ironically.

A wild fusillade of shots filled the night from all sides of the canyon. Hidden in the night, the soldiers up on the mountain poured fire down into the canyon.

The Stengali did not answer. Hidden behind their rocks they were invulnerable. After a time the firing died down. Someone up above had realized that the fire was doing no good.

Then the troops above started down.

The Stengali waited.

The troops came on; they reached a spot halfway down. Two soldiers paused to make sure the lieutenant was indeed dead.

The Stengali opened fire.

Caught on the slope, the soldiers were no match. Half of them fled back up the hill, leaving bodies all over the slope. The other half dove

for cover. There, on the slope, they lay pinned down by the accurate fire of the Stengali.

"Move out," Max Steng whispered.

The word was whispered down the line of hidden guerillas. Half continued to fire. The other half left their places, and, hidden by the boulders, moved silently away into the dark at the closed end of the canyon. Illya Kuryakin watched admiringly.

"I thought they would have a way out," the small blond Russian said. "A good trick, Napoleon."

"Sit in what looks like a box canyon and keep the enemy from covering one side," Solo said.

Another half of the Stengali slipped away. On the slopes the pinned-down soldiers were quiet. Up on the crest there was movement as the soldiers regrouped. More Stengali slipped away. Now there were only a few guerillas left —and Max Steng, staying with his last men. The small, bearded leader hissed to Illya and Solo.

"Come."

The two agents followed Steng. The last guerillas fired a heavy fire, then turned and slipped back into the dark. Illya and Solo followed Steng through the rocks in the night. They reached the sheer wall at the box end and found a narrow crevice. They went through the crevice into a dark tunnel.

Five minutes later they emerged on the far side on a small slope downward to the jungle. Illya pointed up and to the left. Solo looked and saw the tall mountain with the white scar—they were very close to the Stengali caves.

"Very clever," Solo said.

But the soldiers proved to be clever, too. As Illya and Solo followed Steng down the slope, there was sudden movement on the mountain behind them. Soldiers poured down—they had guessed the only escape route.

Firing broke out all across the mountain and the jungle. Illya and Solo followed Max Steng into the cover of the jungle. They passed a line of Stengali fanned out in skirmish order among the trees and brush to cover the retreat of the others. But ahead there was also firing.

Max Steng moved among his men, giving low orders. The guerillas moved in silence and precision, fighting an open fight and retreating slowly toward the other firing ahead. Mr. Smith was there, calmly directing the fight. The Stengali had fallen into a bad situation, but they were handling it like the veterans they were.

Illya and Solo watched the progress of the running fight. No one was bothering with them now. Clearly, the attacking soldiers were out to destroy the Stengali if they could. Illya and Solo looked at each other. Here was their chance. Silently, the two agents slipped away into the jungle.

They had gone perhaps a hundred yards when they heard the sharp click of a bolt being drawn on an automatic weapon. Ahead, in a clearing, they saw soldiers in uniform pouring through the night toward them. They searched for an escape.

"Here! Quick!" a voice hissed.

A face peered out from the bushes. Illya and Solo did not pause to ask questions. They ran into the bushes and found a deep hole. They jumped down into the hole. Someone pulled a cover over the hole. Moments later there was the sound of voices above. The soldiers were searching for them.

In the hole they squatted with their unseen benefactor. The soldiers above beat the bushes. Then the voices moved away. Solo lighted his small ring flashlight. A dark man they had never seen grinned at them.

"Ah, Mr. Solo and Mr. Kuryakin, a pleasure to meet you!" the man said. "A greater pleasure to be of service. I think we will be safe now."

Illya narrowed his sharp eyes. "Who might you be?"

"Ah, allow me to introduce myself. I am Ahmed Bengali, a member of the security police. As you can see, I have been working undercover with this regiment."

"For the premier?" Solo said.

The dark man shook his head. "For Zambala! I am a policeman, not a politician. The premier assigned me to watch Colonel Brown. As you can see, I worked closely."

The dark man wore the uniform of a captain in the second regiment. He indicated his uniform, and then he looked anxiously at the two agents.

"I imagine you gentlemen learned what I learned."

"What would that be?" Solo asked.

"That Colonel Brown and Jemi Zamyatta are plotting a coup to take place tomorrow!" Bengali said.

Illya nodded. "We learned the same. But not the time."

"I have the time, and there is no time to lose bringing our word to the tribunal," Bengali said.

The dark man listened. The night was totally silent now. The three men emerged from the deep hole and stood in the jungle. Then they turned and ran off into the night.

An hour later they came out on a road where Bengali had a car waiting. They got into the car and drove off fast toward San Pablo and the presidential palace, where the international tribunal was convened at once.

ACT IV
WHERE ARE THE REBELS OF YESTERYEAR?

THE SAN PABLO airport is on the southern outskirts of the city, set between the mountains and the

sea. It was noon when Illya Kuryakin and Napoleon Solo stood on the runway with Premier Roy beside them.

The tall premier was serious and grateful.

"I want to thank you personally, gentlemen, for clearing up this appalling situation."

Since dawn the premier had been back in office, the wheels turning to head off the coup. Zamyatta and Colonel Brown were in San Pablo prison. Martial law had been declared, the other regiments brought into San Pablo and the second regiment contained and disarmed in its barracks. A full hunt was on for the Stengali, and the Organization of American States had been alerted to have troops ready to move in case.

"That U.N.C.L.E. was here was a pleasant surprise," Premier Roy said to the agents. "I will not ask how you learned of our need, but I will be eternally grateful for your so expert aid. Without your testimoney, I doubt that I could have convinced the tribunal of the necessity for immediate action against Zamyatta and Colonel Brown."

Illya frowned. "But the Stengali, Your Excellency. We found no evidence of their complicity. They were being used as dupes."

"Ah, perhaps. But they are very clever, my friends. Steng is a devious man. I think, perhaps, he fooled you. Bengali has proof that Steng has been dealing with Colonel

Brown. Undoubtedly they had a falling-out.

"No, they must also be crushed if we are to have peace in Zambala. I have allowed them to exist too long. I blame myself. Max Steng detected weakness, and it gave him hope. He must be taught that there is no room in Zambala for violence."

Solo was about to speak, when Illya smiled and nodded.

"Of course, you are probably right," Illya said. "Tell me, that woman, Jezzi Mahal, have you apprehended her?"

"Ah, Brown's lady," M.M. Roy said. "No, but we will. I have a search on for her. Rest easy, gentlemen. Your work has been well done. I do not think I will even need OAS troops. Of course, the tribunal will remain in session until I can suspend martial law. I want

all my actions open and observed. That is the only true course of democracy. All open, no ugly, deadly secrets."

"Of course," Illya said. "I think we can report that all is secure in Zambala."

"Take my solemn oath for that, gentlemen. And once more my thanks, and the gratitude of my poor country. I believe your plane is ready."

Solo and Illya saw the stewardess of the plane waving to them. It was time to go. The two agents looked toward Martin O'Hara, who was showing no recognition. They thanked the premier, and walked to their plane.

Solo carried his attache case. But Illya carried a large suitcase the small blond could barely carry. At the plane he turned this suitcase over to the stewardess, and the agents boarded the small, twin-engined plane.

There were few passengers, the plane making two more stops in more popular tourist areas of Jamaica and Antigua. The two agents took their seats and watched out the window. The official group of the tribunal and the premier were still watching the plane. Then the plane taxied down the runway, and took off into the blue sky over San Pablo. It flew high over the mountains and the jungle on its route across the island, its propellers glinting in the sun.

"We're not really leaving, are we?" Solo said in a low voice as he smiled at the pretty stewardess.

"Of course not," Illya said, beaming at the stewardess. "It is all very wrong."

"Very," Solo said, nodding at the stewardess.

The two men talked very low while they smiled and nodded at passengers and the stewardess. They looked like two young men on holiday without a care in the world.

"How did Bengali know who we were? Even our names," Illya said.

"The premier is very anxious to wipe out the Stengali," Solo said.

"No one should have known who we were," Illya said.

"How did Bengali happen to find us so easily?" Solo said.

"We escaped very conveniently," Illya said, looking out the window at the high central Zambalan mountains below.

"We escaped very conveniently many times. Those soldiers were terrible shots on that cliff road," Solo said. "That note from Zamyatta was very conveniently left where I could find it. And I got away."

"But we did see Zamyatta with Colonel Brown," Illya said.

"The regiment was on the move, and did try to hold us," Solo said.

"It is confusing," Illya said, "and I don't like it. Are you ready?"

"Ready," Solo said. "In that suitcase, of course?"

"Of course," Illya said. "Shall we go?"

The two agents stood up and sauntered back toward the baggage room. Inside, they quickly opened Illya's suitcase. They took out the two parachutes and the two small oxygen masks and cylinders. The cylinder on, the parachutes on, and the masks in place, they opened the cargo hatch.

Moments later the two parachutes floated down in the afternoon sun toward the jungle below as the plane flew on toward the sea.

* * *

ALONG the familiar fence, the two agents watched the soldiers in Tidworth Barracks. It was night now, the trip across the island toward San Pablo having taken many hours. There was singing in the barracks, a great many soldiers wandering across the parade ground and the quadrangle, and no sign of guards anywhere.

"Well, there it is," Solo said.

"No evidence that the regiment has been affected at all," Illya said. "We found no units of any other regiment anywhere near here."

"No roadblocks, no change from ordinary barrack life," Solo said.

"In short, no one has been arrested except Colonel Brown!" Illya said.

"A loyal man and good soldier," Solo said.

"I think, Napoleon, we should have a talk with the good colonel."

"I think we should," Solo said.

The two agents faded into the night. A few moments later they reached the small, black car they had stolen earlier, and drove off toward San Pablo.

There was no sign in the calm night of the usual affects of martial law. All seemed peaceful in Zambala.

An ominous peace.

The prison was as silent as ever, set into the hill outside San Pablo. Illya and Solo found many more guards this time.

There were two at the door; the two agents shot one each with the sleep darts from their U.N.C.L.E. Specials.

Quickly they changed clothes with the sleeping guards, and dragged the guards into a nearby empty office. Then they went up the stairs and began their search. They found the cells of Colonel Julio Brown and Jemi Zamyatta at the very top of one of the new wings.

"They don't want any escape this time," Solo said. "I always thought that Stengali escaped too easily."

"They don't want any escape yet. I imagine it might be arranged later," Illya said.

There were two guards in the jail corridor outside the barred door into the top cellblock. There was another guard inside the cellblock near the actual cells. There were alarm boxes on the wall both inside the cell block and outside. It

would be necessary to silence the three guards quickly.

They shot the two outside guards with sleep darts and ran fast toward the cell block. The guard inside whirled at the sounds. Illya shot him on the dead run and the guard slumped to the floor inches from the alarm box. Solo bent and took the keys from the fallen guard.

Solo opened the outer barred door and the two agents went down the line of cells. All the cells were empty until they reached the last two. In these last cells Jemi Zamyatta, and Colonel Julio Brown, stood watching the agents.

"Good evening, gentlemen," Solo said.

Zamyatta watched them, looked at their guns. Colonel Brown looked at their guns, and then at their faces.

"You two! You work for the premier?"

"Never mind who we work for," Illya said. "The question is what work are we going to have to do."

Zamyatta was puzzled. "What work?"

"My blond friend means do we see that you two are put away, or do we turn you loose?" Solo said.

The two prisoners stared at the agents.

TWO

THE HULKING shape of Jemi Zamyatta sat on the bunk in the cell and listened to the story of the two U.N.C.L.E. agents. Colonel Julio Brown was a more nervous type. The colonel paced the floor of the cell. When Illya and Solo had finished, Zamyatta spoke. The bull-like opposition leader spread his powerful hands.

"I swear, gentlemen, there was no coup!"

Colonel Brown swore. "None at all! There was no threat to the premier."

"Except, perhaps, a change in Zambala," Jemi Zamyatta said. "We are becoming a country. The days of chaos are over, or they were. If I were to be elected, I was ready to amnesty Max Steng and his men. No, the danger was that the great Lion of Zambala might not win a next election!"

"Was it generally known that you planned to pardon the Stengali?" Illya asked.

"No, not generally—but Roy knew!" Zamyatta said.

Colonel Brown said, "And he knew that I favored such a move! Any such move. The army has been too important too long here. There is too much of Zambala still in the hands of the rich and the foreign companies."

Illya Kuryakin frowned. "Just to stay in power is not enough for all this. I mean, no election had to be held for four years."

"The pressure on the government to spend more money on peaceful development might have caused Roy worry," Zamyatta said.

Illya shook his head. "No, there is more behind this."

Zamyatta looked at the two agents. "Let me say again, there was no planned coup. I know nothing of the attacks on Roy or Mura Khan. I had no dealing with Max Steng, or with the Colonel here."

Illya rubbed his chin. "I saw you two meet."

"Colonel Brown asked to speak to me," Zamyatta said.

"I had been told to question Mr. Zamyatta," Colonel Brown said. "There was a report of undue influence among my men by Mr. Zamyatta."

"Who gave you that report?" Solo asked.

Colonel Brown looked at Zamyatta. "The premier told me! And he also ordered a secret alert. He said it was a test. He did not want anyone to know he had ordered it. I was to prepare my men for a move, but tell no one why."

Illya shrugged. "He set it up, Napoleon. All of it. It was all intended to create the threat of a coup."

"And we fell into it," Solo said.

"No, we were guided into it," Illya said.

Solo turned to Colonel Brown. "Why did your men shoot at us on the cliff road, and later when we were with the Stengali?"

Brown showed surprise. "My men? No, Mr. Solo. My men pursued you in the hills. We had orders to hold anyone who came to Tidworth. But we gave up after you escaped our trap. We did not pursue the Stengali, and we did not shoot at you on the cliff road. None of my men left the camp."

"The major who was killed," Illya said, and described the dead major to Colonel Brown.

The colonel shook his head. "I have no major like that, no officer who fits that description."

"A fake, and a fake unit!" Solo said. "And Bengali was with them!"

"We've been played like fish on a line," Illya said.

"Maybe we can be the fishermen," Solo said.

"It seems like a good idea," Illya said.

"What do you want us to do?" Colonel Brown said.

"Be ready," Illya said. "Colonel, do your men trust you? I mean, will they follow your orders against the premier?"

Brown shook his head. "No, not unless I can prove to them that the premier is a traitor."

"But they will follow your orders against someone else? If they get proof later?"

"Yes, I think so. Who else?"

Illya frowned again. "I'm not ready to say, it's only an idea, but it seems that there are some other armed men on this island we have to deal with."

"You want me to return to my command?" Brown asked.

"Yes, and bring them into San Pablo," Illya said. He looked at

Zamyatta. "Can you reach the Stengali, Mr. Zamyatta?"

"I can try," Jemi Zamyatta said. "They must have heard of my arrest. Max Steng and I were longtime friends."

"Try to reach them and bring them into San Pablo."

"Where in San Pablo?" both men wanted to know.

"The presidential palace," Illya said. "Bring all the men you can as soon as you can. Capture anyone you don't know, or anyone who resists. We can apologize to the wrong ones later."

Without more discussion, the four men left the cells and quickly stripped two of the guards. Zamyatta and Colonel Brown disguised themselves in the guards's clothes. Then the four men went down through the silent prison corridors and out the front door.

In the prison yard they found police vehicles. Solo went to work and crossed wires to start two of the jeeps. Zamyatta took one and headed off into the mountains toward the tall mountain with the long scar near the summit.

Colonel Julio Brown took the other jeep and started along the road toward Tidworth Barracks.

Solo and Illya drove their own small stolen car through a silent and deserted San Pablo toward the presidential palace. They had to drive carefully. The city was silent under the edict of martial law, and patrols of troops walked the streets.

But there were few patrols. Illya and Solo looked at each other.

The martial law was another fake—just enough martial law to convince the people of Zambala that a crisis existed. A crisis someone wanted to exist!

"When we get to the palace," Illya said. "I'll go in. You take the car and go to O'Hara."

Solo nodded. "Bengali knew who we were, by name. Only O'Hara knew who we were."

"Unless he told someone," Illya said.

"When I have the word, I'll call you," Solo said.

The car drove on carefully through the silent city.

The wide grounds of the presidential palace were silent and shadowed in the night. Illya Kuryakin glided silently from tree to tree, closer always toward the palace. Men in uniform patrolled the grounds—men not in army uniforms but in black uniforms!

Illya crept and crawled until he reached the cover of the thick bushes that surrounded the palace. He moved through the bushes around the palace, sinking out of sight from time to time as soldiers passed in groups of two. He reached the kitchen door he had noticed earlier. It was locked. With one of his picklocks he opened the door and slid inside.

Illya moved along the dark halls. There were voices. He entered the enormous entry hall of the palace.

The voices came from the room where the tribunal met. Illya cat-footed to the door and looked in. Chairman Ramirez was there with most of the other members.

But both O'Hara and Boya, the labor leader, were not there.

Illya turned away and moved silently through the other downstairs rooms. He did not find what he was searching for. From the rear of the house he went up the service stairs to the second floor. He saw a line of light far off at the end of the long upstairs corridor that was as wide as the corridor of a grand hotel, and carpeted with deep carpet.

The light came from a room at the opposite end of the palace from the room where the tribunal met below, a room that showed no light from the outside or Illya would have seen it. He started along the hall and saw the guard.

The man in the black uniform was seated in a chair between Illya and the room that showed light. He held a sub-machine gun across his lap, and tilted back in the chair, cleaning his nails with a long trench knife.

At his feet was a small black box that had to be a radio.

There was no way past the guard, and no way to creep up on him silently enough. If Illya shot the man with a sleep dart, the chair would go out and there would be noise. In addition, his ears told him that the radio was switched on! It was a transmitter, and any sound would be heard at the other end wherever that was.

Illya looked around. He was near the door of a room that showed no light beneath it. He went into the room and crossed it to the window. As he remembered, a narrow ledge of decoration ran around the palace at this height. He opened the window and climbed out onto the ledge

Flat against the building in the dark, he inched like a fly on a wall toward the window of the room where the guard sat—he had noticed that the guard was practically against the door of the room. As he inched his way he saw the soldiers pass below, but they did not look up, and, luckily, this night clouds covered the moon.

Illya reached the room he wanted and went in through the window. He crossed the room to the door. His move had to be fast and soundless. He took another small capsule from his pocket, took a deep breath, and jerked the door open. He was through the door and on the man in a second.

The guard leaped up. There was no sound on the deep pile carpet. The chair came away from the wall. The man half-turned toward him. Illya squeezed the capsule, caught the man, and dragged him into the room. He came back out, closed the door, and listened.

There had been no sound at all.

The radio transmitter still hummed faintly under the chair. Illya stepped past and went to the

door that showed light. There were voices inside and a large keyhole. Illya bent down to look. He saw them through the keyhole. Two men and a woman laughing and drinking champagne from a row of bottles in ice buckets. He could see no one else.

One of the men was the tall Premier M.M. Roy, the Lion of Zambala. The woman seemed vaguely familiar. Then she turned and he saw her face. For a moment he did not recognize the beautiful face. Then Solo's description came to him—Jezzi Mahal!

The woman laughing now, drinking champagne with Premier M.M. Roy, was Jezzi Mahal. The woman who had killed Inspector Tembo! The woman who was Colonel Brown's girl-friend! The woman who had been so deeply involved in the plot against the premier! The woman who now leaned on the tall, laughing premier, who turned up her beautiful face and kissed M.M. Roy!

And the third man, who raised his glass in a toast inside the guarded room was Ahmed Bengali! All three of them laughed together—and Illya knew what they laughed at.

THREE

ILLYA KICKED in the door, and stood there with his U.N.C.L.E. Special covering all three of them. For a minute they stood with their champagne glasses raised, laughter still on their lips.

"Let me in on the joke," Illya said. "I enjoy a good laugh."

Premier M.M. Roy was a very well-trained diplomat. Shocked as he must have been, as much as the gaping mouths of the woman and Bengali showed they were, the tall premier managed a cool smile.

"Ah, Mr. Kuryakin. What a pleasant surprise. I thought you were on your way home."

"You were supposed to think that, Your Excellency," Illya said.

"So I gather," Roy said. "May I ask why? And just what you are doing in my private rooms with that weapon? The guard—"

"Is asleep," Illya said bluntly. "I'm afraid it was necessary to make you think you had fooled us."

"Fooled you?" Roy said, for the first time a faint edge of something coming into his voice.

"With the coup business," Illya said. "It wasn't done badly, but a trifle clumsily, I'm afraid. Especially your friend Bengali, there. He shouldn't have been quite so on-the-spot to be sure that we came back safely with our news of the coup by Colonel Brown."

Roy placed his champagne glass on a table. "I see."

"And he really should never have used our names. That was a bad mistake. How could he know our names? Even you did not know our names."

Roy looked sadly at Bengali, who was now quite pale. The dark security man began to stammer. Roy sighed.

"Really, Ahmed, you should have been more careful," Roy said.

The tall premier looked at Illya. "Well, just what do you have in mind?"

"I think the OAS will be most interested in a premier who fakes a coup so that he can declare a crisis and martial law. I presume you intended to liquidate Zamyatta and Colonel Brown at some convenient time after the heat had cooled," Illya said. "The relation between yourself and Miss Mahal will fascinate them. I imagine Bengali will tell us all."

The dark security man swore. "Why, you—"

"Yes, I imagine he would," Roy said. "Just what do you think 'all' may be, Mr. Kuryakin?"

"You faked attempts on your life, killed your own security chief. I expect Mura Khan was too honest. Bengali here will be more pliable. I assume that Bengali arranged much of the fake assassinations, the bombs, all the rest.

"I also expect that Nathan Bedford had seen Mr. Bengali, so he had to be killed. Did you do that, too, Bengali?"

"I'll do better with you, Kuryakin!" Bengali said.

"The purpose was to convince the world that Zambala was about to experience a coup and perhaps a civil war. You knew that the OAS, and the United States, would never stand for that here. You would expose the coup, prevent it, and be in complete charge for much longer than any election would allow."

The premier laughed. "But, Mr. Kuryakin, why would I do all that when my government was in no danger?"

"I think to create a crisis. You would be rid of all threats of an election loss, and you would create a sensitive area in Zambala, a crisis in which you could again be the hero."

"Not good enough, Mr. Kuryakin. Not at all," Roy said.

Illya shrugged. "What does it matter? Perhaps you are just insane. The facts speak for themselves. You did it, and we can prove it now. When we tell the world, I think there will be a new government in Zambala."

The new voice came not from behind Illya where the door was, but from his right. A fine, cultured voice.

"Alas, how true, Mr. Kuryakin. A new government, and I could not allow that. You are right; and how unfortunate for you!"

Illya began to turn.

"Drop the weapon, please, Mr. Kuryakin."

Illya dropped his Special and turned toward the voice. There were five men standing in front of a secret passage into the room. Four of them were black-clad soldiers.

The fifth smiled at Illya Kuryakin.

* * *

SOLO entered the mansion of O'Hara as silently as a snake. The boyish agent crossed the large living room to the bookcase. He pressed the secret button. The bookcase opened. Solo went inside and the bookcase closed behind him.

The girl agent at the desk smiled at him.

"We thought you had left, Mr. Solo."

Solo looked around quickly. "Er, yes, I did leave, but I came back. May I have my badge?"

The girl handed him his badge. Then she tensed as if sensing someting.

"Does Mr. O'Hara expect you?"

"I doubt it," Solo said pleasantly.

The girl reached for the pistol in the holster behind her back. It was the correct procedure for a field headquarters—no one entered U.N.C.L.E. Field Headquarters anywhere in the world without the written consent of the agent-in-charge, or without the agent-in-charge having notified the reception desk of the arrival. No one, not even Mr. Waverly or any other member of Section I!

The girl acted as she had been trained—but she had made the error of not acting at once, lulled by her acquaintance with Napoleon Solo.

Solo caught her as gently as he could, pressed the spot on her neck, and she slumped in his arms. He returned her to her chair. He hurried down the small corridor. The alarm system passed him, of course, since he was wearing the badge the girl had so carelessly given him. He reached O'Hara's office. The TV camera scanned him—and O'Hara made the same error. The door opened.

O'Hara looked up and saw Solo standing there with his U.N.C.L.E. Special aimed straight at O'Hara. The Zambalan chief-agent blinked, opened his mouth, and then started to reach for a button.

"Ah, ah!" Solo said. "No, O'Hara, don't. I would be forced to put you to sleep and ask my questions in private with pentathol."

O'Hara moved his hand away. "Questions? Have you gone mad, Napoleon?"

"Maybe. But I don't think so."

O'Hara blinked. "You came back? I—What's up? What do you mean with that gun?"

"If I'm wrong, O'Hara, I might apologize. But it is clear now that there was no coup, no attempt at revolt, no assassinations or attempts. It was all a put-up job by Premier Roy. But not the premier alone. Somone else in Zambala is behind it, and that someone knew, and knows, who Illya and I are!"

"A put-up job? No coup? Someone else?"

O'Hara stared at Solo as if either

he or Solo had lost his mind. The chief-agent seemed to sit there at his desk totally paralyzed. Twice he stopped. He seemed to be staring at Solo's pistol.

"You were the only person in Zambala who knew who we were!" Solo said. "No one else knew U.N.C.L.E. existed in Zambala! Unless you told someone."

Solo watched the chief-agent-in-Zambala. Only twice before in U.N.C.L.E. history had an agent at any level turned traitor for any reason. Once the unfortunate man had lost his mind. The second time was the case of the woman in Personnel, Section V, who had been a planted THRUST agent. Never had anyone above Section III been suspected—and O'Hara was Section II!

"Knew? No one knew! No one outside myself and two agents in this office, communications and reception, could have known! It is not possible! I told no one at all except perhaps—"

O'Hara stopped. Napoleon Solo froze. For a full fifteen seconds the two men stared at each other. It was O'Hara who spoke.

"Except Carlos Ramirez! The night you reported the connection between Colonel Brown and Zamyatta that you had found at Jezzi Mahal's beach house. I told Ramirez!"

Solo turned without a word and ran out of O'Hara's office.

He ran down the corridor where the other agents had found the receptionist and were waiting with guns drawn.

"No! Let him pass!" O'Hara shouted, strapping on his gun, running after Solo.

Carlos Ramirez smiled at Illya Kuryakin. The tall, white-haired old poet leaned on his cane and smiled sadly at the blond agent. Illya could not take his eyes off the distinguished face of the old poet and patriot.

"You!" Illya said.

The old man shrugged, his austere face suddenly going hard, twisted. "Me! Yes, the old poet! Why is it that you idealistic young men must think that because a man is a poet he must also be a fool? Mao-Tse-Tung is a poet, a great poet, perhaps better than I! Then why should not a Western poet be also a practical man of politics, and power, and profit!"

"Poet and patriot," Illya said.

The old man laughed. "Patriot? The last refuge of a scoundrel, Mr. Kuryakin. But in my case, being a patriot means being a Zambalan. I want the best for my country—and the best is that I run the country behind the figure of the Lion of Zambala! It is my country!"

The fine and noble old face twisted into a mask of sudden hate. "My country, and my power! Where do you think a man gets his power, Mr. Kuryakin? From his money and his influence! I own many companies. I am the man who gets the loans from abroad. I sell the guns,

Mr. Kuryakin, and the means of defense! If they all stop fighting, if there is no crisis in Zambala, if the great powers are not worried, then where do I get my power?"

The old man laughed. "For me to remain powerful, I must have them against each other. I must have a crisis all the time. Zamyatta was going to pardon Steng! Julio Brown wanted peace in Zambala! The lion and the lamb were to lie down and work out the future without strife! I could not have that. No, in another few years Steng could have laid down his arms, Zamyatta could win an election, Colonel Brown could have made friends and peace.

"Could I allow that, Mr. Kuryakin? No! Why, in a really independent and free Zambala, who knows what the people might learn of how I live, and how much the Lion of Zambala and myself owe to the, shall we say, contributions of certain foreign companies? Zambala belongs to those companies, and to me! I intend to keep it despite the childish dreams of Zamyattas and Colonel Browns and Max Stengs!"

All the while the old man had been speaking, Illya had watched them all. The old man was clearly half mad. But the others, the tall premier, the woman, the dark Bengali, they all had a stake in keeping Zambala in crisis. The soldiers in black showed only that they were loyal to Ramirez. Now the old poet saw Illya carefully watching. He smiled.

"Ah, you are always alert, Mr. Kuryakin. I like that. When O'Hara told me who you were, I knew we had to act faster than we had intended. Who knows what might have happened if you had had too much time to think after your visit to Brown. Still, Bengali was very stupid. Sergeant!"

The old man waved his cane once and snapped the word, "Sergeant!" The sergeant fired a burst from his sub-machine gun. Ahmed Bengali was hurled backwards and lay dead in a pool of blood.

"I dislike bunglers," Carlos Ramirez said. "Bring him!"

The old poet turned and stalked from the room, leaning heavily on his cane. The soldiers prodded Illya Kuryakin.

The blond agent marched out with M.M. Roy and the woman behind him.

FOUR

THE OLD poet led the way down a narrow flight of hidden stairs behind the walls of the old palace. They seemed to go down for some time, but Illya realized that they were only going at an angle behind the walls. At last they came out into a large room that was lined with stone walls.

"The cellar, Mr. Kuryakin. As you know, San Pablo was once a pirate port. This cellar is part of the

old castle. It is most convenient. Listen."

The old man held up his thin, aristocratic hand. Illya listened. There was a sound, a strange sound off to the left. The sound of running water!

Carlos Ramirez smiled. "Yes, an old underground river. It is all but forgotten, you see. But I always loved the history of my country, and there was a story of the river. It runs out to the sea in a hidden cove. The old governor often used it for his pirate forays. I find it most convenient for disposing of unwelcome guests."

"Very interesting," Illya said.

"Isn't it?" Ramirez said. "Bring them all. We will get them out this way."

The soldiers marched Illya across the large, gloomy cellar to the left wall. The old man opened a door. Through the door Illya could see the deep dark river running fast, and a boat moored to the side. A stone walkway seemed to run to the right out of sight. Ramirez turned to face Illya.

"I don't imagine you could be persuaded to join me? I could make it worth your while. I like intelligent young men. Surely you have enough intelligence to know that we live in a jungle, and that you could do so much better if you would drop your ridiculous ideals."

"I imagine I could," Illya said. "But I prefer to keep my ridiculous ideals."

"Why, Mr. Kuryakin?"

"Because someone must have them."

"Ah, an honest public servant. Unfortunate."

"Besides, there is Mr. Solo."

"Naturally my offer includes him."

Illya nodded. "I suggest you tell him yourself then."

Ramirez laughed. "Really, Mr. Kuryakin, I—"

The old poet never finished. Solo appeared in the doorway to the secret river. O'Hara stood beside him. The soldiers started towards them. Solo and O'Hara cut them down in a hail of bullets. M.M. Roy raised his hands. The Lion of Zambala shouted his surrender!

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot."

The woman, Jezzi Mahal, was made of stronger metal. She bent quickly to snatch a gun from a fallen soldier.

Illya Kuryakin dove for cover.

For a long minute the old man stood alone in the center of the cellar staring in disbelief as his men fell under the hail of accurate fire from the U.N.C.L.E. Specials of Solo and O'Hara.

Then Jezzi Mahal opened fire. Solo and O'Hara turned their guns on her. She was down behind a heavy cask. The two agents had to take cover. Illya leaped up from where he had been lying and tackled the woman. She went down, biting and kicking. Solo and O'Hara came to his aid. Together they sub-

dued the woman. Illya looked around.

"Ramirez!"

The old poet was gone. Illya and Solo left O'Hara with the prisoners and searched the cellar. Illya saw the second secret exit. It was a narrow tunnel that led up and out into the grounds.

"He's gone for his soldiers."

"I saw them," Solo said. "A whole private army."

"Upstairs, quick!" Illya cried.

They herded their two prisoners up the same way they had come down and came out in the main entry hall. The members of the tribunal were milling like sheep. Illya waved his pistol, the gun he had picked from one of the dead soldiers.

"Inside! Back inside!" Illya shouted.

They all went back into the ornate conference room. O'Hara went to work barricading the only door. It was heavy and had a strong lock. O'Hara, and the members of the international tribunal, piled chairs, enormous sideboards, and cabinets against the door. O'Hara handed extra guns to members of the tribunal, and told them to guard Roy and the Mahal woman.

At the windows, Illya and Solo looked out into the dark grounds of the palace.

"It's quiet," Solo said.

"It won't be," Illya said. "Ramirez won't give up. If he can kill us all, he can still get away with it."

"At least he'll try," Solo said. "Here they come!"

The black-uniformed troops came out of the dark and trees and ran toward the palace. Illya and Solo held their fire. Then, as the black-uniformed troops almost reached the palace, they opened fire.

The attackers went down like wheat under a scythe from the fire of the two agents. Some of the tribunal members joined them at the windows. O'Hara covered a third window.

The attackers turned and ran back to the trees.

In the ornate and elegant room of the palace, Illya and Solo watched the dark trees. The two agents lighted cigarettes and sat down against the wall.

"He'll send them back," Solo said.

"He will," Illya said.

"How much do you think they'll take?"

"Hard to say. Let us hope, Napoleon, that they will take very little more."

"We have very little more to give," Solo said. "Ammunition,"

"I'd rather not think about that," Illya said.

Solo raised up and looked out the window. A faint light was streaking the sky to the east. Dawn, and in the light Solo saw the black figures come again out of the trees. The two agents rested their guns on the window sills.

They beat off one more attack.

On the third attack there was not enough ammunition. The black-uniformed attackers poured into the palace and began to beat on the door into the ornate and vast conference room. Solo and Illya fired their last rounds into the heavy door. Screams outside and for a moment the attack on the door stopped. Then the shouts began again, and—

The shouts stopped.

The hammering on the door stopped.

Many feet ran away out of the palace.

There was the sound of many guns firing outside on the grounds elegant in the growing light of dawn. Illya and Solo raced to the windows. Outside the black-uniformed soldiers were broken and running, some of them. Most had dropped their guns and stood with hands high.

Through the trees of the palace grounds, the whole of San Pablo spread out below in the dawn behind them, came the ragged guerillas of Max Steng, Mr. Smith and Steng himself in the lead. And with them were the uniformed men of the second regiment, Colonel Brown and Jemi Zamyatta leading them.

"Look!" Solo said, pointed.

One small knot of black-uniformed soldiers had formed and now opened fire. Standing behind these men was Carlos Ramirez. The old poet stood tall, his cane waving, urging his men on.

The Stengali and the second regiment troops opened fire.

Carlos Ramirez fell with the last of his men.

* * *

ALEXANDER WAVERLY searched in the pockets of his waistcoat for a match. The busy brows of the aristocratic face were knit in a frown as he failed to find a match. Napoleon Solo handed his chief a book of matches.

"Er, thank you, Mr. Solo," Waverly said. "Well, although I must say that you gentlemen took a frightfully long time to realize how you were being handled, the affair seems to be coming to a satisfactory conclusion. The mice have won and the cat is gone, shall we say?"

"Roy?"

Waverly succeeded in lighting his pipe. "Yes, with Ramirez dead, Roy seemed to think it wise to allow his deputy to become acting premier. The acting premier has exposed all Roy's personal dealings with various American and British companies who think more of profit than people. The election will be held next week. Zamyatta seems assured of victory, especially since Max Steng has agreed to stand with him."

"I believe even Mr. Smith is standing for parliament," Illya said.

"And Colonel Brown, although refusing to participate in politics,

has agreed to serve as minister of war and security chief, no matter who wins the elections."

"I should think it a shoo-in for Zamyatta and Steng," Solo said thoughtfully.

Waverly puffed on his pipe. "No election is a shoo-in, Mr. Solo. The people can never be predicted. That is the truth of a free system. So be it."

Waverly frowned and sighed. His pipe had gone out. He looked sadly at it. "Our problem is a bit less pleasant. O'Hara, of course, proved quite loyal, and his knowledge of that secret river entrance into the palace certainly saved the day, eh, Mr. Solo?"

"It did, sir," Solo said.

Waverly nodded moodily. "Yes. However, as you reported, Mr. Solo, O'Hara told Ramirez who you were, and his organization is lax. No, there is no way out of it. O'Hara and his entire unit must go. I have sent the de-training team down. O'Hara and all his people will be de-trained and let go."

"Is that necessary sir?" Illya said. "He is a good man."

"Not necessary, Mr. Kuryakin. Mandatory," Waverly said. "O'Hara and his people were guilty of a security breach. I have taken steps to replace them already. Unfortunate. You know, I recruited Martin O'Hara personally many years ago. I knew his father quite well."

For a long minute the two agents watched their chief look sad and old—much older than they could have guessed. Then Waverly took a deep breath, and began to look again for a match.

"Well, enough of our little cat and mouse affair," Waverly said crisply. "You gentlemen are ready, I trust? It seems that our friends of THRUSH are up to their tricks again!"

Illya Kuryakin and Napoleon Solo smiled to each other and sat back to listen in the sunny office.

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The World's Second Oldest Profession

"Double-cross me?" The big man laughed, pulled a wicked little .38 from his shoulder holster. "I am a good friend, a very bad enemy. You will not be the first man I have killed—nor the last!"

by JOHN REESE

THE HORSES were still ten yards from the wire when Pel began tearing up his ticket. It was only the fourth race, but he turned to go. He bumped into a tall man in a topcoat and snap-brim hat, and excused himself.

"Quite all right!" the man said, smiling. "I too go blind when I lose. What did you have?"

His voice was deep and resonant, his accent just British enough to be both attractive and a trifle phony. He towered over Pel a good six inches, yet he did not look bulky. He had a harsh, big-featured face with prominent cheekbones, deep-set eyes and a long, slanting jaw. Pel knew instantly that he had never seen the man before, yet somehow he still felt he knew him.

"I have no idea," he said. "I never bet. I was just bored stiff and picked a horse blindly."

"I love the horses!" said the stranger. He glanced at the toteboard, which had just flashed the winner. "There, I've ninety-odd dollars to collect. If you can wait, I'd like to buy you a Martini to minimize your pain."

"Thank you, but I really must go."

The stranger took a firm grip on Pel's arm. "Nonsense! You're the first chap I've spoken to since I

came to Los Angeles, and I really insist. Beautiful track, isn't it? I've always wanted to see Santa Anita, and I've won nearly two hundred. Please, old man!"

Pel had him placed now. This was no chance meeting. How long the stranger had followed him, waiting for the opportunity to turn on that rugged, domineering charm, he had no idea. But he was sure that, under his fine topcoat, the man wore a shoulder holster with a hand-made Pirisch .38, of which

there were not more than a dozen in the world. They cost $1,200 each in Switzerland, and were enormously in vogue in the world of espionage and counter-espionage.

The Smith and Wessen .38 that regulations insisted that Pel wear made him feel cheap and dowdy. He decided to take it out and polish it up a little tonight, but meanwhile, he might as well see where the fellow was going.

Five minutes later, seated in the clubhouse with a drink each, they were fast becoming old friends.

"It's a hobby of mine, to deduce the professions of people from their appearance," said the stranger. "Would I offend you if I told you yours? Let's see, it's something artistic yet well-paid—you've prestige as well as a sensitive talent. I've got it!"

"What?" said Pel.

"You're head of the English department at a fine college—no doubt an exclusive school for girls."

"Nothing so interesting. I'm editor of a dinky little trade magazine, that's all. Nothing literary."

The stranger's face fell. "Still, it's not entirely a miss. Myself, I'm afraid I'm a bit of a tramp. Played some professional golf, flew in a few wars, but that's work and work is dull, eh? If it weren't for the horses, I might have to find a real job. Ghastly thought!"

Pel's next line unreeled before him as though he were reading a script. "Sounds like an ulcer way to make a living, betting the horses."

"Not the way I do it!"

"Don't tell me you have a system!"

"In a sense. I rely on a computer. A horse race presents a limited number of relational factors, which is where the digital computer is at its best. It's no better than the information given it, and one doesn't always win. But I follow the rules, and in the long run it pays handsomely."

"Really!"

"Yes. But there really are rules. One—bet only when the computer is sure. Two, always bet the same amount—in my case, fifty dollars per race. So long as you don't unbalance the odds by hunch-betting, the computer will be on your side. I find I win four-point-six out of seven-point-one bets. That's a handsome profit margin."

"Sounds incredible," Pel murmured.

"Oh no! I'll give you an example: The next race is no good. The computer could reach no firm conclusion. But in the sixth, the machine was sure and the odds are attractive. How about betting ten dollars yourself?"

"No. I only came here because somebody gave me a pass. I'm not a gambler."

"Girl trouble?" the stranger said softly. "Really, I'm afraid it shows."

"My wife left me."

"Please forget my intrusion! I—

I lost the one woman myself. One is never the same, is one? The dreary days, the somber nights—God help us all!"

Shortly the stranger excused himself to place his bet on the sixth, but he showed no interest in watching the race. They sat chatting in the clubhouse until it was over. Then the stranger reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a $50 ticket on the winner. It was worth exactly $715.40 at the window, but he did not seem to be elated by his triumph. Perhaps he was remembering the one woman.

They parted then. The stranger showed no interest in where Pel worked. But he did proffer his business card, which identified him as Eric Jordan-Carpenter, technical consultant for a diesel engine firm in Coventry, England. There was nothing Pel could do but hand over his own card. Mr. Eric Jordan-Carpenter glanced at it, pocketed it carelessly, and gave Pel his huge, strong hand to shake.

Back in his office, Pel tried to think what to do. Was this really a feeler, or had he become so security-conscious that he was seeing spooks? Should he report it in detail to Colonel Haygoode, or not?

If he was right, he decided, he would be hearing from Mr. Eric Jordan-Carpenter again. Plenty of time then to free the hounds.

Pelton Parmer was editor of the *Icalbar Bulletin*, published monthly by Icalbar, Inc. In five years he had converted it from a dull house organ to one of the most respected scientific journals in the world. Icalbar, Inc., manufactured exactly nothing. It was a consulting firm, one of those known in the trade as a "brainstormer." Its only clients were the department of defense and its contractors and subcontractors.

C. Holcomb Haygoode, U.S.A., Ret. was chief of security at Icalbar. He had been there only two years, and he had put the company's 9,573 employees through a whole series of fresh security examinations. Pel's had merely reinforced his conviction that he could spot an intelligence or counter-intelligence man as far as he could see him.

The miracle was not that Icalbar and similar firms were impenetrable; that simply was not true. But the other side's spies were as stupid as our own, Pel thought, wherein lay our salvation. Secrecy was like the climate in a mushroom cellar; only a fungus like Colonel Haygoode could thrive in it.

What, really, could he tell the good colonel about this afternoon's encounter? Of course he had seen Mr. Eric Jordan-Carpenter win sizable sums on two races. But he could have bet *every* horse, and plucked out only the winning ticket. There had been only seven horses in the fourth race and five in the sixth. That meant only a $600 investment, even if the winning horses had paid short odds.

And $600 was not much, if it seduced the editor of the *Icalbar Bulletin*. To Pel's office came scientific articles from all over the free world. Scientists, young ones especially, were enthusiasts. They talked too much. It was a continuous struggle for Pel to satisfy his scientific writers without giving away information that could be imporant—critical, even—to the frêe world.

Pel had started life as a mathematician, but he was not good enough to compete in the mathematical world of today, and he soon knew it. He had written a few scientific articles for the Los Angeles newspapers while still a student at California Institute of Technology. He drifted into a job as a science reporter, met and married Mercedes Pettit, a society editor, then was offered the job as editor of the *Bulletin*.

Mercedes did not thrive in the mushroom cellar atmosphere. Their last conversation had proved that.

It began with her asking Pel not to bring home any more meatheaded intelligence people.

"If I don't ask them around once in a while," Pel said, "they'll get suspicious and investigate me again. Honey, everywhere you go, you have to work with jerks."

"But only at Icalbar do you have to live with them exclusively. Darling, with your reputation, you could get a job in a minute that would pay you more than Icalbar pays. Why do you put up with it?"

"There is such a thing as patriotic duty."

"Duty! Maybe you think it's patriotic to submit your guest list in advance, every time you have the girls in for bridge. I don't. I don't know any Red spies. I never did know any Red spies. I never will know any Red spies! Also, I don't like the way Colonel Haygoode looks at my legs."

That was that. Pel was sure that Mercedes loved her country and respected Icalbar's part in its defense. In her way, she was right.

But it was hard to break the habits of five years, hard to give up the prestige of being editor of the famous *Bulletin,* and harder still to tell Mercedes the truth. He had been offered a job as editor of the *Synthetic Finisher,* the official organ of the National Institute of Inorganic Paint, Enamel and Lacquer. The pay was almost twice what he made at Icalbar, and he would have been given a free hand in building it into the finest publication in the booming world of industrial chemistry.

But—and this, Mercedes would never understand—had he resigned at Icalbar, he would only have been subjected to more investigations. Had he had time to break this news to her, and prepare her for more idiot interrogations—

But she was gone, and here he sat, waiting for a man met at Santa

Anita to call on him. Mr. Eric Jordan-Carpenter did exactly that, but not too soon. Oh no indeed! One did not rush things, in the world's second-oldest profession. Nearly three weeks passed before Mr. Eric Jordan-Carpenter called Pel and asked him to go to the races with him.

"I'm in a bad streak, old chap, and my morale needs a lift," he said. "The computer is still with me, and so are the horses. But the damned jocks have betrayed me twice! What good are the electrons, when your boy loses his nerve and won't go inside? I need a bit of plain old luck."

"Really, I'm pretty busy—"

"Please, as a favor! Where may I pick you up?"

Pel consented. He even took out his Smith and Wesson, removed the cartridges, and made sure he remembered how to shoot the damned thing. He considered reporting to Colonel Haygoode, too, but not seriously.

He went with Jordan-Carpenter to Santa Anita and saw him win four races for a profit of $929.50. He went again, a week later. This time, Jordan-Carpenter bet only two races, saying the machine was inconclusive on all the others. He won twice.

They had dinner together afterward. Jordan-Carpenter drank quite a bit and got a little loose-mouthed. Your man-of-the-world, soldier-of-fortune type can always

carry his liquor. If Pel had been suspicious before, now he *knew*.

"I've got a good bet for tomorrow, old chap," said Jordan-Carpenter. "The only thing, I can't let you bet it at the track. Odds are a bit tricky—un'erstan'?"

"No thanks. I told you, Eric, I never bet."

"Oh, everybody needs money! You don't care about—oh, linseed oil, either, do you? But if I had told you that I had cornered the market on it, and tomorrow was going to start calling in the shorts, you'd prick up your ears, eh?"

"But a horse race is different."

"It's eckshackly the shame! Just don't knock the odds down on me by betting at the track, or betting so much with a bookie that he'll lay off at the track. Lishen—El Chaparito in the third. Argentine horse, only out twice, bad luck both times, lovely odds and class of the race!"

"You seem so sure!" Pel said, as

wistfully as he could. "I've got to send my ex-wife a check next week, but maybe I could scratch up a ten-spot."

"Sure! Then sen' her a diamond ring. Sen' her two!"

They dropped it there, and each went his own way. And, shortly after midnight, Pel telephoned a friend on the overnight desk of a newspaper, and asked if Jim Leech was still on vice in the Los Angeles Police Department.

Certainly he was, the friend replied. Only he was Captain Leech now, and was commander of the University Division. The friend also provided his home phone number.

Pel Parmer phoned him, getting him out of bed. Jim Leech was just a cop. He had never rocked a single government to its unsteady foundation.

"Jim," said Pel, "what do you know about horse racing?"

"That's question number one," Leech replied, with a yawn. "Let's skip the next few and make a fast stop at about question number five, shall we?"

"All right, tell me this. With or without the aid of a digital computer, how is it possible, in an honest race, to pick the winner most of the time?"

"Not by a system, you can bet your shirt! You've got a tip. Tell me the horse, and I'll see if I can check it out."

"All right, but you'll have to trust me. So far, this is in the strictest confidence."

An hour later, Leech called back. "I checked with the best handicappers I know. Their first choice is Sing Happy. Next best is Furtherance. The best long shot is El Chaparito. How good is he? Pel, any horse can have a heart attack and drop dead. Any jock can give him a bad ride. But if you think your tipster has good information, I'd say you've got a good thing."

"His would be good."

"That's the difference between an investment and a bet, with or without the computer. Any more questions?"

"Yes. Where can I find a bookie?"

"I suppose you have a purpose in this, other than winning a few bucks."

"I have a purpose."

"All right, go to the Corregidor Cafe, near the wholesale market. Order a cup of coffee and two pink doughnuts, and carry a newspaper opened to the racing page. I'll be interested to know how it comes out. You'll never be asked to testify, but I would like to verify what I know about this stupid operation before I have it knocked over."

Pel thanked him. The next morning, before going to work, he hunted up the Corregidor Cafe, carrying the morning paper opened to the racing news. He ordered coffee and two pink doughnuts.

"Got something good?" said the counter man.

"A good price, anyway, if I knew where to get a bet down," Pel replied.

The counter man's eyes glinted, as Jim Leech had predicted. They never could resist a sucker looking for a place to drop $10 on a long shot. Pel got his bet down.

He was so busy making up the next month's *Bulletin* that he forgot the race until late that night. He went out for the early editions of the morning paper and found that El Chaparito had won by a length, paying $69.25. He wondered if he would be able to collect his winnings.

He dropped in at the Corregidor the next morning, and a resentful counter man fished out a large wad of big bills, and handed them over.

Naturally, the least Pel could do was phone his dear friend, Mr. Eric Jordan-Carpenter, and thank him. And naturally, Eric was delighted to hear that Pel had cashed in. And no, he wouldn't mind passing on a tip now and then.

"But," he said, "let me book your bets myself. I know how to lay them off without upsetting the odds. Can't risk having your bookie go to the track and knock down the price, after you clip him a few times. You understand!"

Pel understood. How often could a spy, even one of Jordan-Carpenter's extraordinary ability, come up with a winner? By keeping the name of the horse a secret until after the race was over, he could have a perfect record of winners and pay Pel out of his apparently limitless expense funds.

In the next two weeks, Pel booked six bets, on horses whose names he never knew until the races had been run, with Mr. Eric Jordan-Carpenter. He came out with a net gain of $868.10.

And then Santa Anita closed. Regretfully, Eric announced that he never bet on races unless he could be there to see them run now and then. He could not move on to another track because, unfortunately, he had to keep a few stupid appointments about diesel engines.

"Well, it was nice while it lasted," Pel sighed. "I bought her a few nice things, anyway."

"Still carrying that old torch? But of course you are! We're one woman men, you and I."

They were in Eric's beautiful apartment just off Wilshire. A pair of small Cornish hens were roasting in the oven—your rugged, soldier-of-fortune types are always good cooks—and a pitcher of Martinis was near at hand.

"I guess that's true," said Pel.

"Of course it is! Let me give you a piece of advice, Pel. Don't do as I did, and let her slip away, and carry the pain for eighteen years. Win her back!"

"Oh, sure, that's all! Just win her back."

"My dear boy, when she's the

one woman, it's worth every effort. Money always helps. It's not the money, but the things it will buy that the one woman always deserves. A good fur piece. Tickets to a New York opening and a week in a good hotel there, once a year. A smart convertible, a Don Loper cocktail dress, her own credit cards —isn't this the environment she deserves?"

Mercedes? thought Pel. What Mercedes wanted was to put her feet up on a chair and read a book while setting her own hair, and enough insurance so they could afford kids.

But he clenched his hands and rubbed them as though they had dampened with sweat.

He said, "Of course it is! But what the hell, I work for a peanut outfit."

"You're underpaid, yes." Good old Eric had been baiting the trap so long that he was sweating a little too, now that he was about to spring it. "And owe them nothing, nothing! Still, my own firm does engineering, and there are others. I could get you some extra money, Pel, if you'd let me see some of the scientific stories that never get into your silly little Icalbar *Bulletin.*"

"I don't think I get you, Eric."

"Every scientist in the world reads the *Bulletin.* You have an international reputation, yet you never give away trade secrets. That's fine, if you want to work for peanuts. But there is far more money, old chap, in the pieces that never get past the censors and into print."

"You mean espionage," Pel gulped.

"I mean industrial espionage, yes. There isn't a company in the world that doesn't try to steal the secrets of its competitors. You know that yourself."

"Hold it, Eric!" Paul stood up indignantly. "In Icalbar's business, there are no trade secrets. Ours are of value only to another nation, not another company."

Jordan-Carpenter frowned and blinked in bewilderment. Then, suddenly, he threw back his head and laughed.

"Oh, you think I'm a Red spy! You amaze me, Pel. Do you imagine that the Reds are the only people who want to know what you Americans are doing? If I told you that this was Crown money, would it make a difference? I don't give a damn myself. I happen to be a loyal British subject, but I know my own worth, and Her Majesty pays me well."

Pel sat down. "Oh, then—"

"There is no ethical question between allies."

I suppose you're right, but—"

Jordan-Carpenter said coldly, "Pel, I will give you one hundred dollars in cash every week, whether or not I get anything of value from you. You are too well-informed not to know what has value, so I won't try to cheat you. Bring me some-

thing pretty good, and I'll pay you an extra hundred. Bring me something extraordinary, and I could go as high as a thousand."

"But Eric, you have no idea of—"

"Of your security precautions? Indeed I have! You can't bring out manuscripts, but you have microfilm equipment in your own office, and as a matter of routine, you microfilm every manuscript submitted to you. When a manuscript is rejected for simple lack of merit, you send it back and destroy the microfilm.

"But when some contributor has blunderingly revealed a trade secret, the manuscript is returned to the author by one of your security officers. He warns the writer and sees to it that his manuscript and notes are destroyed. Meanwhile the microfilm remains in the files of your chief of security. What I want is just one day—a chance to see that microfilm before he gets it—before it goes from your office to his."

Pel had a few more drinks and audibly wrestled with his conscience. But weren't the British our friends? Didn't we steal their secrets too?

He made the deal.

What he did not tell Eric was that he never gave anything of importance to C. Holcomb Haygoode to read. Pel knew when a thing should or should not be published, and when a scientist did send in something that should be classified, it was inevitably an innocent blunder that he could correct in a five-minute conference.

It was not the scientists who were to blame when this happened, but the muddled mishmash of duties exacted by security, in which the left hand knew not what the right hand did.

Twice, Pel had sent manuscripts to the colonel. Both times, investigations, grillings, lie-detector tests. Rohrshach tests, sex questionaires and other indignities had been the fates of the unlucky contributors. Pel had barely managed to get out the *Bulletin,* and Mercedes had had to cancel a date to see a play that was on somebody's forbidden list.

"Just to show good faith, old boy, I want to give you a small honorarium to bind the deal," Eric said, handing Pel a fistful of $20 and $50 bills. "But just in case you ever consider double-crossing me, please believe that I am as bad an enemy as I am good as a friend."

Eric took from his shoulder holster his wicked little Pirisch .38, and hefted it in his big palm.

"Great Jehovah, a gun!" said Pel.

"Exactly! You would not be the first man I have killed, nor, probably, the last."

"Eric, if you don't trust me—"

They parted friends, Pel carrying the $500 in easily negotiable American currency. Although it was after midnight, he went straight to Captain Jim Leech's house.

He was sure this was safe. Jordan-Carpenter would know immediately if he ratted to Colonel Haygoode. No doubt he had "operatives" in Colonel Haygoode's office, just as the colonel had a few in Eric's. This was what used to irritate Mercedes so badly—trying to remember who was loyal to whom.

But neither Eric nor Colonel C. Holcomb Haygoode would ever suspect a scientific editor of Pel's stature to know a simple, ignorant city cop.

"This could be tough," said Leech. "You think he has enough bookmaking equipment there to convict him?"

"I'm sure of it, Jim," said Pel. "He really is a devoted student of the horses, and in addition to certain other income he has, I think he probably makes quite a bit of non-taxable money, booking bets for his friends."

"Well, let me get dressed and call a couple of men. But tell me this—what's your interest in a clown of a bookie?"

"I can't tell you that, Jim. Security! You know."

"I know," the captain sighed. "But you're going to have to get us inside. We haven't got anything for a warrant, and I can't just kick in the door. How does that fit into your security situation, if I may be so bold as to ask?"

"I'll just have to take the chance."

Pel Parmer drove Leech to the university station. There, Leech got into an unmarked police car with three detectives. The police car followed Pel to Eric's smart apartment building. The front door was locked, but Leech showed the porter his badge, and they were admitted. The officers tiptoed up the stairs behind Pel to the second floor.

Pel rang Eric's bell. He stood there a moment, his heart pounding, his scalp literally creeping. He could hear Eric coming toward the door, but he listened in vain for the click of a light switch. Eric Jordan-Carpenter was too old a hand for that! He would, out of habit, remain in a dark room, leaving any such caller vividly at a disadvantage in the lighted hall.

"Who's there?" came Eric's voice.

"It's Pel Parmer, Eric. I—I changed my mind. I want to give you back your money. I can't go through with this deal," Pel whimpered.

The door opened, and Eric said, "Oh, you changed your mind, did you? This is as good a time as any, old boy, to make it clear to you that you can't do that!"

Pel found himself staring down the barrel of the jewel-like Pirish .38. It was pointed straight at his chest, from less than ten inches away.

And at the exact split-second that Pel saw the Pirisch, Eric saw the four big policemen coming at his open door. There was no time

to close the door, but he could do one thing. He pulled the trigger.

Nothing happened. The wonderful little hand-made Pirisch, so beloved of intelligence and counter-intelligence men all over the world, misfired. Eric dropped it and used his fists. He was a good man, but not good enough to stand off one editor and four policemen for more than a minute.

Inside, they found one whole filing cabinet full of race information, including a list of some 125 of Eric's betting clients. Methodical man that he was, and typical of his mushroom-cellar environment, he had maintained records of every bet booked for the last year.

In another filing cabinet was a mass of another sort of information —codes, ciphers, rolls of microfilm, scientific publications, even a thick file of clippings from the Icalbar *Bulletin*.

"What is this junk?" said Captain Leech.

"Never mind," said Pel. "Just take the best tip anybody ever gave you, and take it out somewhere and burn it. If you ever turn it in, I guarantee you'll be filling out questionaires on your sex habits for the next ten years."

"At my age," said Leech, "I can tell them the whole story in ten minutes. But if you say so."

One annoying load was off Pel's shoulders, but he was no closer to a solution of his most agonizing problem than ever. He had almost been persuaded to resign, by the irksome Jordan-Carpenter business. It did not really matter for whom Eric had been spying. Seeing intelligence and counter-intelligence men daily in the office was bad enough, but when they took up his nights too, it was really more than he cared to tolerate.

Only his dread of the searching investigation that would result from his resignation kept him from turning it in and going back to Mercedes. But this, too, was settled for him by an inter-office communication that was brought to his office by a security agent. It said:

TO: Pelton Parmer, Editor, The Bulletin.

FROM: C. Holcombe Haygoode, Lt. Col, U.S.A., Ret.

SUBJECT: Suspension of security clearance.

You are herewith separated from your position and your security clearance is herewith revoked. It has been brought to my attention that you recently placed a bet on a horse race at a bookmaking place called the Corregidor Cafe. Gambling is prohibited by Sec. XXIV, Paragraph 10 (c) of the Revised Security Regulations. You will therefore hand in your security badge to the officer who bears this, and under his supervision, inventory your desk before your departure. There is no appeal from Sec. XXIv, Paragraph 10(c).

A DRAMATIC SPY STORY NOVELET

NIGHTMARE FOR A NIGHT

by ROBERT EDMOND ALTER

When a counter spy trail grows old, and the quarry is hidden and deadly, it's time to call for help—help from a secret agent named Death . . .

THE FIRST time Peter Vance was consciously aware of Colonel Luft was while he was sitting in a beer garden just east of the Tiergarten.

Vance was waiting for his wife and daughter to meet him, and he was sitting there minding his own business, enjoying his beer and pipe and the passing traffic. Not too far away was the Brandenburg Gate and the infamous Concrete Curtain: the *Schandmauer,* the West Berliners called it—the wall of shame. It was all very new and interesting to him.

Then this short, fat, sunshine-faced man of uncertain age and not much hair came along the sidewalk and stopped in front of Vance's table to inspect one of the battery of curb-vending machines.

He put a coin in the machine, which whirred with a businesslike tone and produced a neatly folded handkerchief in a hygienically-sealed plastic bag.

As the fat man commenced the

struggle of trying to remove the hanky from its plastic prison, the machine (it was a female machine) spoke to him through the wonders of tape recording: *Vielen Dank,* "Many thanks," a lady's voice said.

The fat man turned and smilingly ran his eye over the crowded cluster of zinc-topped tables, and then placed a hand on the back of one of the empty chairs at Vance's table and said, "May I?" in faultless English. "So kind of you." And sat down.

Vance was about to inform him that he was expecting his family, but the fat man had his nose in his new handkerchief and he detonated an appalling noise.

He folded the handkerchief carefully into his pocket and smiled at Vance.

"My name is Luft, Colonel Luft."

He didn't offer his hand, but there was something expectant about his look, and so Vance mentioned his own name. Then the colonel said:

"I wonder if you'd do me a minor favor?"

I wonder if you make your living trying to bilk tourists, Vance thought.

"What is it?" he asked suspiciously.

"I merely want you to accept a piece of paper. I will hand you the slip of paper, without any great to-do; you will glance at it, observing the same casual spirit, and put it away in your pocket. Right?"

It seemed like the beginning of a rather elaborate gimmick—but also a way of getting rid of the nut.

"Well, all right," Vance agreed.

The colonel produced a very small square of paper and leaned across the table and gave it to Vance somewhat covertly. Vance looked at the two words printed on the face of the paper: *Thank you.*

He looked up. The colonel was already on his feet. He winked at Vance and walked briskly away, disappearing among the pedestrians.

"Screwball," Vance muttered.

He crumpled the slip of paper and was about to throw it away. Why he didn't he didn't really know. But then he *had* told the man he would put it in his pocket. So he did, feeling embarrassingly annoyed with himself. He of course forgot about Colonel Luft immediately and completely.

That evening, after packing wife and daughter into a cinema, Vance returned to his hotel to get on with his novel. He came down the deserted, carpeted hallway quietly and stood in front of his door fishing in his pocket for the room key. A sudden glassy *pow* sounded from the other side of the door, startlingly.

Vance stared incredulously at the door and thought, *Must have left a window open and the wind knocked over a vase.* Then he

thought, *Burglar.* And then he thought, *No, don't be melodramatic. It's one of the maids, probably.* But still he hesitated, staring at the mute, blank-faced door.

He had too much imagination to ever be a brave man, but he was one of those normal everyday cowards who are scared to death of making themselves appear ridiculous by exhibiting their fear. He couldn't bring himself to go down to the lobby and say to the desk clerk, "There's a noise in my room."

So he unlocked the door with quiet caution, and edged it open and looked into the room.

The desk light was on and a small, wiry, old old man was going through the typed manuscript pages of Vance's uncompleted novel. Vance cleared his throat and the little old man popped around and looked up like a startled bird.

"*Oh*—oh, dear me," he said weakly. "I'm afraid I've wandered into the wrong room." He rearranged the set of his glasses on his beaked nose and peered around undecisively, and then smiled at Vance the same way.

"Yes," Vance said testily. "I'm afraid so."

"What I mean to say," the little old man hastened to explain, "is that I realized some minutes ago that I had gotten the wrong room by accident; but then I happened to notice your manuscript on the desk here and I couldn't seem to help myself. I stayed to read some of it. You see, I am well acquainted with your work, Mr. Vance. I've read every one of your suspense tales to date."

There was no better way to get on the right side of Vance (or any other hack writer, either).

"Really?" he said. The little old man had caught him so off-guard,

with a sense of personal gratification, that for the moment he forgot to inquire how the little old man had wandered into the wrong room through a locked door.

"Yes, yes," the little old fellow chanted, meandering absently and sort of helplessly in the general direction of the door. "I certainly hope that this new book will prove to be as good as *The Copper Night.* That was my favorite of—"

Something said *plat* and the little old man's head snapped straight up as his clawed hands leaped toward Vance's chest, the expression on his pale face one of gawking shock. Then he began to bow at the knees and start down for the floor, like a slow elevator.

Vance simply stood there and watched him go, watched him settle to the floor on his knees and then

sprawl over the carpet, all arms and legs and flapping white hair. Then he smelled the cordite fumes in the room.

The window to the balcony was open and the curtains were stirring inward with the night breeze. Vance watched a hand with a pistol with a silencer push through the crutains, bringing along the arm and then the rest of its body.

Colonel Luft stepped down from the sill and smiled at Vance.

"Evening," he said jovially. "Rather upsetting, isn't it? I think, Vance, if you can make it to that chair over there, you'd better sit and let me fetch you a drink. You look a bit peaked."

Vance didn't think he could make it to the chair. He thought it would be much easier just to fall to the floor with the little old dead man. "You—you killed him," he whispered, still not totally capable of believing what he had just witnessed. "You shot him in the back."

"Um-hmm," Luft agreed, walking his brisk fat man's walk across the room, around the body, and to the door. He closed it. "Of course it's hardly the proper protocol for your American TV shows. *Those* hero-killers always creep up behind their victim's back and call him by name, and then shoot him in the gut when he turns around. That's rather crude, don't you think? Actually? Unnecessarily cruel. For myself, I'd much rather not know it was coming."

"You killed him," Vance reiterated stupidly. "A helpless, senile old man!"

"Had to," Luft said, taking out the handkerchief he had purchased earlier that day and wiping the doorknob with it. "He was a Red agent. A minor one, to be sure, but dangerous nevertheless. And he wasn't quite as old and helpless and befuddled as he liked to appear. That was his cover. He was good enough at judo to throw you and three others just like you through the window and into the street below."

He returned to the body and hunkered down by it.

"Now," he said briskly, "let's see what we have here." He began a methodical search of the dead man's clothes, using his left hand, the stumpy, pudgy fingers moving with quick precision. "Here we are," he said shortly.

He stood up with a small green notebook in his hand and leafed through the pages, grunted to himself. "Uh-huh. It's what I was afraid of. He was keeping notes on my movements today."

"Colonel, if that's what you really are," Vance cried, "what is this all about?"

Luft put the silencer-clubbed end of the pistol to his head, like a man preparing for suicide, and scratched the back of his ear with it.

"Well, to begin with, I have a little something on tonight that calls for a certain amount of care. A lit-

tle too late, I'm afraid, I realized that Max here was keeping tabs on me. So I led him down to the Tiergarten today and I picked out the first likely tourist I saw." He smiled good-naturedly at Vance. "You."

"I let him see me slip you that worthless piece of paper, knowing beforehand how his limited intelligence would react. It threw him off base. He reasoned you must be working for me. So he started to tail *you,* which gave *me* a chance to tail *him.* When he thought you and your family were safely tucked away in the cinema he came here to go through your things, to discover just who you are and what you were up to."

"But why did you have to shoot him in the back?"

"I told you: he knew too much about me. And worse—" Luft wagged the green notebook—"he had it written down."

Vance put a trembling hand to his face and rubbed his mouth with it. Then he snatched the hand away and said, "You realize I can't swallow any of this, don't you? It's fantastic! I think you're a common murderer and sneak-thief."

Luft grinned, showing a set of small, white, perfect false teeth.

"Well, there are nicer names for it."

"Like what? What do you call yourself?"

The colonel shrugged, as if the matter were of little importance. "For the moment let it suffice that I'm working for the CIA. They're on your side of the fence, you know."

"Oh, come *off* it, Luft! You're not going to palm that nonsense off on me. You just murdered a man, and I'm going to——"

"I don't think you'd better," Luft said calmly. He was aiming the silencer at Vance's stomach now. "I think it would be better if you'd just take my word for it—at least for tonight."

That seemed to remind him of something. He snapped the sleeve back from his left wrist and frowned at his watch.

"All of this has cost me a little too much valuable time," he muttered. He looked at Vance.

"The problem now, he said quietly, "is what to do with you. I can't very well just walk off and leave you on your own; you'd be bound and determined to phone the police, which would make it awkward for me to cross into East Berlin tonight."

Something formed a point in Vance's stomach and began to spread, coldly.

He swallowed.

Luft stared at him speculatively. "Hitting you on the back of the head and leaving you trussed and gagged is never satisfactory; too much chance that you might work yourself loose, or someone might come along and discover you."

"Colonel," Vance spoke to him in German. *"Verstehen Sie?"*

"Yes," Vance said, still in English, nodding his head numbly.

"Tell me so—in German."

Vance told him so. "I understand what you're saying. I taught German in a New York university, before I started to write espionage novels."

Colonel Luft chuckled delightedly. "I see the perfect solution for both of us. Mr. Vance, *you* will accompany me into East Berlin tonight!"

"Now wait, Colonel. I don't want to become invol—"

"Why, it's made to order, man! Now I won't have to inconvenience you to—keep you quiet. And you will be gaining first-hand experience for your book. You came here to write one around the Concrete Curtain, didn't you?"

"Well, yes. But, Colonel, I really don't—"

"There! You see? Ideal. Now, I'm afraid we really must hasten. I'm running short of time. We'll just carry friend Max here into the hall and find a convenient laundry chute or something for him. Don't want to leave a shocker like this for your family to come home to, eh? Then we'll be on our way. I have a station wagon down in the street."

"Colonel, listen to me. This is madness. I can't—"

Colonel Luft smiled his most genial smile and let Vance have another look at the business end of the silencer.

"Please?" he prompted graciously.

VANCE drove the station wagon. Luft sat beside him with the pistol in his coat pocket, his hand too. The colonel said: "To talk about this is of course unmannerly and probably unnecessary. But I want to be certain that you understand my position and yours. I must enter East Berlin now. If you in any way try to call out for help, I shall be forced to kill you within the instant. And it's possible, probable even, that other innocent people might suddenly find themselves in an awkward position. You understand?"

Vance understood, though it crossed his mind to wonder if Luft would actually shoot him in front of policemen—and shoot the policemen as well. Then he decided, Yes, he would. Because Colonel Luft seemed to have a disregard for human life that was downright medieval.

"Colonel," he ventured, "if you're working for the CIA, as you claim, why don't you have the West Berlin police help you in whatever it is you're attempting to do?"

Luft complacently watched the Brandenburg Gate loom solidly in front of them. "My friend, when you've been in my business as long as I have, you learn to operate on the principle that everyone around you is an enemy agent. Believe me, West Berlin has its fair share of

Red agents, even among their police.

"Then too, there's the consideration that this man we're going after must be removed from the East in secrecy. The CIA doesn't want it bruited about that they had a hand in his disappearance. Because you see, once they get hold of him, that's just what he's going to do: disappear."

Vance took his eyes off the road, fixed them on Luft. "We're going to remove a man from East Berlin? Tonight? Now?"

"Yes. A supposed dead man. Watch that pedestrian."

Vance hit the brakes. "A *supposed* dead man! Colonel—"

Luft nudged him with the blunt iron thing inside his coat pocket.

"Please drive on, Mr. Vance. I'll explain when we get to the other side. Mr. Vance—drive the car!"

Vance drove the car. It was something like driving into a nightmare.

They had no trouble at the West barricade. The policeman asked for identification and Luft gave him a wallet from his inner right-hand coat pocket, and Vance showed his visa.

"Good luck," the policeman said.

"Thank you," Luft replied. "I can always use more of it." Then, as Vance eased the car up to the next barrier of wire, he said, "Don't show the Vopos anything. You won't even have to speak."

Vance applied the brakes and took in a deep breath. A thick-lipped, iron-eyed East German policeman, nattily uniformed in gray-green, with gleaming boots and an unslung burp gun, stepped up to the window and carelessly rested the barrel of his gun on the window ledge. Vance looked down the round black blank hole and wet his lips.

Luft reached into his inner left-hand coat pocket and brought out another wallet and handed it over. The Vopo looked at it without much interest and then nodded the burp gun barrel in Vance's face. *"Wen darf ich melden?"*

"His name doesn't matter; he doesn't have any papers," Luft told him. "He's a temporary affiliate of mine."

The Vopo nodded and handed Luft's wallet back and turned away, signaling the okay to two militia men in field dress.

"Just take it easy now." Luft said quietly. "Don't be in any rush when they clear the wire."

Vance wasn't in any rush at all. If he'd had his way he would put the car in reserve and keep it there all the way back to the hotel. The car slid under the huge old gate and cautiously entered Unter den Linden. Then Vance looked at Luft again.

"Just what form of Open Sesame did you use just then to get us in so easily?"

Luft chuckled. "Getting in is no problem. But getting out is some-

thing else again. I merely showed him my card from the Soviet Military Headquarters."

"Your card from the Soviet—"

Vance shut his mouth and turned the car to the curb and braked. "Colonel, I insist on knowing what this is all about. If you have a card from the SMH, you must be a Communist agent yourself."

Luft glanced at his wrist watch, nodding. "Of course. I couldn't get anything done otherwise."

"My God, Luft, whose side are you on?"

"I've already explained that to you, Mr. Vance. I'm on yours. Look, you've heard of the man who led three lives? That's much too complicated for me. I simply lead two lives, one East, one West—that is, when I'm in Germany. In other countries—" He shrugged. "Politics are always flexible."

"In short, you're a free-lance *agent provocateur*. You work for the highest bidder."

Luft yawned. "Yes, that just about covers it. Now I really think we'd best be getting on."

"No, not yet. You haven't explained about the supposed dead man."

Luft sighed heavily. "It's very simple. I'm going to remove a man, a doctor, from East to West. The doctor lives in the Leninallee district, alone with his housekeeper. She is in my pay. For twenty-four hours she has been feeding the good doctor doses of digitalis to induce a condition similar to a heart block. She will phone another doctor—who, incidentally, is also a West supporter—and he will come and slip the first doctor a morphine injection to induce in him a death-like state—"

"Wait! Wait a minute!" Vance cried. "Does this doctor, the first one, want to be removed to the West?"

Luft appeared surprised by the question. "Why, my dear fellow, I have no idea whether he does or not. I doubt if anyone thought to ask him. Presumably, he doesn't. But that's neither here nor there."

"My God, Luft! You're doping an innocent, unsuspecting man with digitalis and morphine in order to kidnap him! Who is this doctor? I mean, what can make him so important for you to do all this to him?"

"Beats me," Luft said "I don't know who he is, or why they want him in the West. It's simply my job to fetch him." He looked mildly concerned.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Vance, you don't understand this business at all. Let me give you a hypothetical case: let's say that a bunch of your state department boys are sitting around in D.C. having a coffee-break, and one of them casually mentions, 'It would be nice if we could get this Dr. So-'n-so on our side.'

"Two weeks later and four thousand miles away an obscure agent

known as Max is shot in the back in a West Berlin hotel. The state department boys have never heard of Max, and he has never heard of them; because between the two a multitude of orders have been issued and certain strings have been pulled and a whole nether world of nameless agents (such as myself) have gone into action—none of us knowing *why* we are doing what we are doing, but merely knowing that it has to be done. See?"

Yes, Vance could see that part of it; but what he couldn't handle was Luft's methods. "Yes, but good Lord, Luft, this business of the digitalis and the morphine and the deathlike state and—well, it's all too totally mad."

Luft smiled appreciatively. "It is rather, isn't it? That's why it appeals to me. Know what I mean? It smacks so of the unexpected. You see, after my doctor pronounces the other doctor 'dead,' he will notify the authorities and they will send round a district Vopo, who will probably know the rudiments of first aid and who will think he recognizes a dead man when he sees one.

"Then my doctor will sign the certificate of death, and the housekeeper will phone the 'dead' doctor's brother to come claim the body. *I* will be the brother. I have papers on me to prove it. That's where we're going now, to the place where I am to receive the phone call."

Vance whispered, This is impossible. Madness—"

Luft frowned. His voice took a sharp edge. "Mr. Vance, you'd better realize that your position changed once we passed through the gate. You are no longer a threat to me. I could shoot you here and now and no one would hear the shot or realize that I was sitting in the car with a dead man. The reason I haven't shot you is because you were brought into this thing unwillingly, and because you've been very cooperative—so far. You understand? If you try to rebel now, I will be forced to kill you. And it would grieve me greatly."

The idea of Colonel Luft grieving over a dead man, any dead man, was incongruous to Vance's image of Colonel Luft. But he didn't care to test his conviction. He put his foot on the accelerator and drove where Luft told him to. It all seemed very inexorable.

LUFT took him to some sort of sleazy nightclub in an old bombed-out area. They had to go down

steps to get inside, and stepping through the door was like walking headfirst into the emanation of all the world's hopeless night people—those who were trying vainly to lose their sick apathy in tinseled excitement.

The throbbing music was a bad try at the blues, mostly sax and bass. There was no air, only smoke and talk. Sometimes there was laughter, high and shrill, like pain. Vance hated the place.

A girl—no, woman—with bright, metallic hair and a hard, beauty-parlor face came toward them quickly in the foyer. She gestured at a closed phone booth.

"There's a call for you, Gregor," she said to Luft.

"Yes, I've been expecting it. This is Mr. Smythe, an Englishman."

"Gregor," the woman said wearily, "if you have something on, please do it somewhere else. There's enough trouble here tonight. The secret police are in the main room checking identity papers, and—"

"Then you'll have to put Mr. Smythe in your little room upstairs. I have to leave him here for a bit."

"No, Gregor! You simply don't under—"

"Wait a minute," Vance cut in desperately. "You can't just leave me here. I have no pass, no papers. They'll—"

Luft nodded impatiently, trying to get to the phone booth. "That's why I can't take you. That Vopo at the doctor's house would want to see your papers. It wouldn't do at all. You must wait here for me."

"But, Gregor," the woman insisted, "I'm trying to tell you he—"

"Lisa," Luft snapped, "I have no time to argue. You must take him upstairs. He can't go with me, and we can't leave him here for the SP's to question, and I certainly can't have him out in the street by himself for the Vopos to find. Now excuse me—the phone."

Luft wedged his massive body into the glassed booth and somehow got the accordionlike door closed on himself. Vance looked at Lisa. He was beginning to feel like an ugly orphan. Lisa shook her head.

"Someday I'm going to turn him over to one of his ten thousand enemies and be done with him," she muttered. "He's always this way. Once he starts on a plan he won't listen, won't deviate from it one iota. And now—"

She broke off and turned her head toward the sunken main room. A man was coming up a short flight of steps, rising out of the smoky room.

Lisa threw her bare left arm around Vance's neck, her brilliantly painted, beautiful mask pushing up to his terrorized face. Her mouth was partly open and her eyes went languid and smoky and sick with passion.

"Darling," she said huskily, but loud enough for anyone passing in the foyer to hear, "he'll be away all

night. We'll have the apartment to ourselves. We'll be alone together until dawn!"

"O-oh?" Vance said.

Lisa smeared her moist crimson mouth against his, pushing his back to the wall. Her kiss went on and on, hungrily. If Vance could have used his mouth he would have yelped with shock. He wasn't an asexual man, but circumstances and eighteen years of contented, uneventful marriage had more or less subconsciously conditioned him to a sort of puritan sex-behavior pattern.

Martha, he thought, thinking suddenly of his wife. And then, *Janie,* thinking of his sixteen-year-old daughter. He started to struggle—but not, he realized abjectly, with force. It was a funny thing, but this strange supple female clinging to him was—

Lisa removed her mouth and looked around. Then she let him go.

"It's all right," she told him. "He went into the restroom."

Luft wrestled his way out of the phone booth and said, "I'm off. Now get him under wraps immediately. I'll be back for him presently, within an hour." Then he handed Vance his handkerchief.

"Your mouth," he said, and he turned toward the door.

"But, Gregor!" Lisa cried. "Reuter is upstairs!"

The outside door swung closed on Luft's squat ball-body. Lisa blew out her breath and said something in a murmur that cast a dark question over the circumstances regarding Luft's parentage. Then she took Vance by the hand.

"Come with me, Mr. Smythe."

She led him up a flight of stairs and along a quiet, dingy corridor, then into a room without lights and over to a door. The door contained a closet. She pulled Vance into the black cubicle and closed the door. He could feel the press of garments on the hanger pole at his back and the woman against his side. He could hear her breathing. Then he felt her arm and shoulder move and heard a rustle of clothing.

No, he thought, without conviction *it wouldn't be fair to Martha.* He started fumbling for the doorknob. Suddenly Lisa had his hand again.

She pulled him. "Come straight ahead," she said.

Abruptly the black rear wall began to slide open, showing a smoky, expanding rectangle of light. Vance stared at it stupidly.

It was a small room, with perhaps a dozen men sitting on benches, with one man standing on a podium at the far end, talking. Vance started through the entrance and a burly youth in a scuffy leather jacket appeared magically and and presented the barrel of a Luger to Vance's stomach.

"It's all right," Lisa said hurriedly. "Gregor sent him."

"Good," the youth said crisply. He jerked the pistol straight up, as

a soldier presents arms. "*Heil* Hitler!" he said to Vance.

"Y-es," Vance said doubtfully.

The man on the podium was tall, ramrod straight and fifty-something years old. He wore a crew cut and a black patch over his right eye. His left eye was bright and quick and fanatical. He was saying:

"—to you: let the fools, the Communists, the Capitalists, the rest of all the politically misguided and unenlightened, fight out their absurd little cold war, while we of the new order, the Fourth Reich, will—" His voice stopped at full halt between two words. His cutting eye had spotted Vance and the woman.

"Lisa," he said in an outraged tone, "who is this person?"

Accordingly the dozen heads swung around to Vance. He almost made an involuntary step back. They were all burly men, and each one bore the stamp of the primordial brute in his face. Except for the youth with the Luger, there wasn't a man present who was under forty.

Oh God, it isn't true, Vance thought, realizing that he'd been led into a nest of subversives. Worse than that—pitiful hangovers from Hitler's mad empire: a battered handful of surviving SS men.

"It's all right, General Reuter," Lisa said. "Gregor sent him. He's one of Gregor's men."

"One of Gregor's men?" the general repeated testily. "But does that make him one of us? Now look here, *fraulein,* we can't have just anyone tramping in here whenever he feels like it."

Lisa shrugged. "Gregor said his name is Smythe, that he's English, and that I had to hide him up here until he could return for him. That's all I know about him."

"Gregor!" the general ground the name in his mouth. "I'm becoming a trifle weary of Gregor's little games. There are even a few of us who are beginning to suspect that Gregor hasn't quite decided yet on which side his bread is buttered."

Luft, Vance thought dispiritedly. Colonel Luft. Was there any superforce secret organization that Luft didn't belong to?

"And did you inform Gregor that we were conducting a meeting here? Of course we realize that it's too much to hope for that Gregor himself might attend. Unless perhaps he's sent this—this *Herr* Smythe as his proxy?" The general's sarcasm was as malicious as a saw-edged bayonet.

"I didn't have a chance to explain about the meeting," Lisa told him. "Gregor evidently had something urgent on tonight. He wouldn't wait for talk. The secret police are making a nuisance of themselves downstairs, and this gentleman has no papers, so Gregor simply said I had to bring him up here and—"

"It won't do!" the general fumed. "It simply will not do at all. Look

at him!" pointing to Vance's ashen face. "He obviously can't be a Nazi. How does Gregor expect us to conduct a secret meeting when we have an idiotic Englishman sitting in our midst? I tell you, I will not have it, and that is irrevocable!"

"All right. All right, General," Lisa said consolingly. "Just let me slip downstairs to see if the SP's have gone. If they are, I'll come back for him."

"Do that. Do that very quickly." The general's mouth clamped on each word like a steel trap.

Lisa turned away and Vance almost made an automatic grab for her arm. He definitely didn't want to be left alone in the room with a dozen Hitlerite madmen. But there was no help for it: the youth with the Luger was staring at him suspiciously, and the woman was gone before Vance could speak. The sliding door clicked ominously behind her.

He cleared his throat and looked around at the remnants of the Third Reich. He even tried to smile, but stopped it when he felt the grimace quiver on his face, ticlike.

All of the men were standing now, watching him with a certain baleful intensity. The one-eyed general waved his hand toward a chair.

"Sit down, please, *Herr*—Smythe."

A somewhat unformed vision of the old war movies of the Nazis and their appallingly sadistic SS inquisitions filtered across Vance's brain.

"Your name is Smythe, and you have no papers?"

"That's correct." He couldn't see that it would help him any to confess that he was Peter Vance, an American tourist. It would only serve to multiply their suspicion.

"How did you cross the barricade?"

"Gregor brought me over. I don't know how he did it. He showed the guards some paper or other."

General Reuter's burning-bright eye studied him fixedly. "Why did he bring you across?"

"I don't know. He didn't say. He just requested that I accompany him."

"And you came. Then you are working for him. Then you know what he is up to tonight." The three statements were not in question form.

"No, of course I'm not working for him."

"Then why did you come with him?"

"Because he forced me to, at pistol-point," Vance said desperately.

The general's abrupt smile was like a careless incision in his narrow, disfigured face. "No, *Herr* Smythe. I think you can do better than that. Much better. I think you can tell us some enlightening anecdotes concerning our good friend Gregor. But perhaps you need encouragement—"

Three of the bully boys began to

fan out from the general and his mob. One of them put a hand in his jacket pocket and brought out the inevitable switch-blade knife. Vance wet his lips and took a step back, right into the wrong end of the Luger in the burly youth's hand. It stopped him short. *What can I tell them that they want to hear?* he thought wildly.

The three brutes hulked toward him, shuffle-footed, their palms curled at their sides, ape-like. The knife in the one man's hand went *zzzik* and the leaping blade caught a wink of light and sparked like quicksilver.

"Look," Vance started to say, "I—"

There was a click of sound and the scratch of wood sliding against wood. The woman's voice spoke right behind Vance.

"It's all right. They've gone."

The general's eye blazed. "It isn't all right. We still want a word with *Herr* Smythe."

"General." Lisa's tone was peremptory. "Gregor is downstairs and he wants *Herr* Smythe immediately. You know how he is. He's armed, and if he doesn't get what he wants he's very liable to start a riot. We can't have it, General. Trouble here would be the end of all of us."

It shocked Vance to realize just how ecstatically relieved he was to hear that that madman Luft had returned to collect him. Any port in a storm, it seemed. He looked at General Reuter and saw that the one-eyed man was hesitating between passion and prudence.

"Come along, *Herr* Smythe," the woman said.

Vance took in a deep breath and prepared to make a move. The three bully boys were within hand's-grab of him. The knife seemed closer.

"Very well!" the general said. "But you tell Gregor I want to see him. It's time we sat down and discussed a working policy regarding himself and this party!"

"I'll convey your message, General," Lisa said curtly.

Vance stepped between the knife and the Luger and into the closet. The sliding panel slid home, creating a silent crash of blackness. He reached out blindly for a wall, seeking support. He thought his legs were going to give way.

"Fools!" Lisa hissed. She opened the door into the room of less dense darkness. Vance followed her, wobbling slightly like a tipsy man leaving a party.

"He certainly returned in the nick of time," he said.

Lisa opened the door to the hallway but didn't use it.

"He hasn't returned," she said, looking at him. "I don't know where he is. I said that to get you out of there before they could rough you up."

Vance made an effort to conceal his disappointment. "But aren't you one of them? A Nazi?"

"Of course not. Do I look insane? I work for Gregor, and when you're fool enough to do that you find yourself with strange bedfellows. Gregor has too many irons in too many fires," she said sullenly. "One day he'll reach for one and it'll burn him. The fool!"

Vance looked at the strikingly manufactured woman.

"Lisa, is he your—" he fumbled for an acceptable word.

She looked up at him.

"My lover?" She smiled wryly. "Sounds funny to you, doesn't it? Gregor—short and fat and bald and fifty if he's a day. Not the type you connect with a woman like me, eh? But then, you don't know much about women, do you, Mr. Smythe?"

"No," Vance muttered. "I don't think so."

Her face was close to his and her obsidian eyes seemed to search for something in his eyes. Then she closed her eyes and kissed him on the mouth lingeringly. Vance didn't resist, didn't think to. He stood there as though rooted and will-less and took it.

Lisa stepped back. She didn't look at him. Her voice was hard and flat and old. "Better for you if you never find out. Come along now. The secret police are gone and you can sit downstairs. And, Mr. Smythe—try not to look so frightened. It's a dead giveaway. Gregor will watch out for you. He will, if anyone can."

Yes, Vance thought bleakly, *if he comes back for me.*

VANCE sat alone in the crowded room and wondered if he had lost touch with reality. How was it possible that he was sitting in an East Berlin nightclub without papers, without friends, surrounded by enemies, waiting for an armed maniac who was doing his utmost to involve him in a killing and a macabre kidnaping?

He looked at his wrist watch. It was late, very late. Luft should have returned by now. *Something's gone wrong,* he thought apprehensively. *Luft's been caught.*

But he was kidding himself. He didn't actually believe that Luft had been caught. He believed that Luft had abandoned him. And why not? Why should Luft return for him? What would it profit him? Luft no longer needed him; he was no longer a threat to Luft's mad scheme.

Vance thought briefly of surrendering himself to the East German police—

Now, Herr Vance, your visa informs us that you are an American free-lance writer, that you are visiting West Berlin with your family; but how is it that you are here in East Berlin without a pass?

I was brought over by a man calling himself Colonel Luft.

Colonel Luft. And who is Colonel Luft?

I don't know. He claims to be working for the CIA.

Indeed? Yet we have no record of a Colonel Luft entering East Berlin tonight. Yet you say you came through the Brandenburg Gate?

Yes—well, he must have used another name. Gregor, perhaps.

Gregor. No, we know of no one called Gregor. There is no record of a Gregor.

Well, I don't know what name he used. He had a card issued by you—by the Soviet Military Headquarters.

Indeed. Under what name?

I don't know.

Did you see this card?

No, he didn't show it to me.

Why did you accompany this man of many names?

He forced me to—at pistol-point.

At pistol-point! How tiresome for you. And what was his reason?

I saw him kill a man in West Berlin tonight, and—

What man?

I don't know; Max something.

Max something. I see. So he brought you over here at pistol-point because you were a witness to the crime?

Yes—well, but there's more to it than that. You see, he plans on kidnaping a man tonight.

What man?

I don't know; a doctor. I don't know his name. He didn't tell me.

I see. Well . . .

Vance groaned. It was all too utterly absurd. No one would believe such a cock-and-bull tale. They would note that he was a writer of espionage fiction and they would smile knowingly, and then the inquisition would begin all over again. *Now, Herr Vance, tell us the* real *reason why you are in East Berlin without a pass . . .*

A girl in a skimpy silk gown hipped up to Vance's side and placed a cold hand on the back of his neck. Her painted city face covered a sullen peasant's physiognomy.

"Buy us a drink, *liebling?*" Her hip pressed against his left arm.

"No, I'm sorry, I'm not drinking. I—I don't wish any company, thank you."

"Don't be that way, *liebling.* You look lonely. I could make you forget your problems. We could go upstairs—"

"No!" Vance said abruptly. He wasn't about to go upstairs again, with anyone. "Forgive me," he said contritely. "I just want to be by myself."

The girl removed her hand from his neck, her hip from his shoulder. She shrugged disdainfully. "Go to the devil, then," she advised him.

Covertly, Vance watched her totter away on her high high spiked heels.

Two off-duty Vopos were sitting at a table three down from Vance. They had two cheaply-sparkling girls with them. They were drinking and laughing explosively and making free with their hands and having a hell of a time in general.

One of the Vopos was looking at

Vance; as the girl in the skimpy silk dress started to pass his chair, he caught her hand and pulled her toward him. He said something to her, his eyes on Vance as he spoke.

Vance saw the girl shrug her bare shoulders again. The Vopo laughed without showing any recognizable trace of honest humor in his hard young face. He let the girl go. He was still watching Vance.

Vance looked down at the table, at his hands folded together in front of him. He could feel them trembling.

I must get hold of myself, he said desperately. *Lisa was right: my fear must be showing in my face like a news bulletin—else why would that Vopo be staring at me so?*

His future looked very unhealthy. He couldn't just go on waiting there for a savior who wasn't coming. Eventually the nightclub would close. Eventually he would be evicted into the dark streets. Eventually someone of authority would find him and ask him questions. And then—

They wouldn't believe his fantastic tale. Why should they? He couldn't prove a word of it. Luft was simply the man who never existed.

They would question him ceaselessly: he would be subject to indignities which made him shudder to contemplate: they would hold him in the East—indefinitely. They would claim he was a spy. It had happened to others, many others,

before. Usually the victims were innocent, and the Communist knew it, but it didn't matter. They held them anyhow. It served their propaganda.

The Vopo three tables down was still studying Vance. His hard young eyes held the look of belligerent curiosity. *One more drink,* Vance thought despairingly, *and he'll come over here and question me.* He looked at his wrist watch again. Bad, very bad.

Luft isn't coming, he said with deadly conviction.

The Vopo was holding a glass to his mouth but he wasn't drinking from it. He stared fixedly across the rim at Vance. Suddenly he set the glass down and turned to his companion and said something.

The second Vopo wasn't holding his schnapps quite so well. Vance saw his thick head roll tipsily on his shoulders as he listened to his comrade. The two girls with them had stopped their purposeless laughter and were looking at Vance too. Their eyes were glassily bovine.

Vance looked desperately around the bedlam-like room for Lisa. He couldn't see her. He felt hopelessly alone and vulnerable. He had to do something, make a move. If he didn't his nerves would fly apart. He could not remain in that room with his abject fear a moment longer.

He stood up and started for the stairs, unable to resist one quick glance over his shoulder. The Vopo who had been watching him stood up. *Walk casual,* Vance told himself. *Don't act like a man in a hurry.* He threaded between two tables, hesitated alongside a chattering girl bending over a third table, her out-thrust *derrière* somewhat blocking his path.

He risked a second look behind him. The Vopo was coming his way slowly, but with rather obvious determination.

Vance touched the girl's hip, muttered, "Pardon me," and slipped by her.

She gave him an odd look, archly suggestive. Someone said, *"Look-out!"* and Vance collided with a waiter bearing a tray of glasses.

For a sick moment he tried to get around the waiter who was executing wild acrobatics with the tottering glasses on the tray.

"Gott-verdummer!" the waiter said irascibly.

"Sorry," Vance muttered absently, seeing a sudden opening and dodging around the man's right side.

"Hey, you!"

He heard the forceful voice behind him and he didn't have to turn and look to know who had called to whom. It was that damned Vopo tagging along in his erratic wake. But he pretended that he didn't know, or hadn't heard. He kept right on going.

A long string of well-dressed people were filing down the steps. Vance ducked behind them and started up the stairs. Once in the

foyer he headed for the door in a hysteria of haste.

What will I do in the street? he wondered wildly. *Where can I go?*

He opened the door, went through it, closed it, ran up the steps to the pavement. The dark night-blowing street stretched away from him, north and south, through the tumbled blackened ruins. He turned south, aimlessly, his mind balanced negatively in indecision. He simply didn't know what to do.

Behind him the door of the night-club swung open with a wan rush of smoky light. Vance started walking down the sidewalk, hunching in on himself against the street-murmuring wind. Through the clack of his own footsteps he heard the crunch of boots coming up the concrete steps. *He's going to order me to halt. In just a moment now he's going to shout at me . . . and what will I do?*

"Hey, you!"

Pretend you didn't hear him . . . keep going. Run—should I run?

For a vivid instant he could actually feel the spine-breaking slam of the Vopo's bullet in his back. Then he thought, *He's off duty . . . does he have a pistol with him? Lord, I didn't even notice. I—*

Abruptly the twin whorl of headlights arced around a distant corner and leveled themselves down the street toward Vance, coming on with the animal-like purr of the engine behind them. Vance kept on walking, watching the on-coming car. It was a station wagon.

The car slowed almost imperceptibly, hesitantly, then picked up speed again. *It's Luft,* Vance said bleakly. *He's seen me but he isn't going to stop because he's spotted that Vopo behind me. Can I blame him? At least he did return. That's something.*

Suddenly the car swept toward the curb, braked with a lurch, and the passenger door swung open with a violent movement.

"Quick!" Luft said.

Vance almost sobbed with relief as he piled himself bodily onto the plastic seat and swung the door closed and felt the thrust of power-driven wheels under him. The Vopo's muted shout, "Hey, stop!" meant next to nothing to him. He simply didn't give a damn.

Good old homicidal Colonel Luft was back again—God bless him!

"I DIDN'T think you were going to stop," Vance said.

Luft handled the wheel with a casual indifference to the rights and safety of pedestrians and other traffic. He glanced in the rearview mirror at the dimishing figure of the gesticulating Vopo.

"I didn't think I would either, at first," he admitted. "But when I saw how helpless and forlorn you looked, standing there alone with that Vopo coming after you, I had a change of heart. I suppose that ad-

vancing middle age softens the worst of us."

He spun the car around a corner, taking a bank shot off the far curb and putting the fear of death into a late cyclist, whose horrified face appeared magically and for a flicker of an instant in the white glare of headlights. Then the fleeing blackness swept him aside with one gulp.

Luft showed no indication that he'd noticed the cyclist who had missed death by a wink of fender.

"Lisa fix you up all right?" he inquired.

Vance's rush of relief wheeled on a spoke of anger, motivated by Luft's previously casual treatment of his welfare. "Do you realize that you placed me in a roomful of old-guard Hitlerites? You might as well have dumped me into a snake pit."

"Were those damned fools holding a meeting tonight?" Luft asked. "I forgot all about them. They're harmless enough. Just old little children playing with the memory of their pretty toy soldiers." He grinned bleakly. "They're useful to me sometimes."

Vance gave up with a sigh. "Well, anyhow," he admitted, "I was mighty thankful to see you come down that street. I didn't think you were ever going to return."

"I ran into a bit of a bind," Luft confessed, "or I'd have picked you up sooner."

"You mean you didn't go through with the abduction?"

Vance looked into the backseat but saw nothing. It was too dark to see anything in the rear bed of the station wagon.

"Oh no," Luft assured him, "that part of it went off as well as could be expected. The good doctor's back there in the rear right now under a blanket. He's been acting up, too. Troublesome."

"Troublesome," Vance echoed.

He had a sudden absurd vision of a corpse on a slab kicking up his heels and flapping his arms about while two harassed undertakers tried to hold him down.

There was now just a hint of peevishness in Luft's voice. "That fool housekeeper lost her nerve. Probably afraid she'd kill him with an overdose, so she gave him an underdose. About the only thing that's keeping him halfway quiet now is that morphine injection my doctor gave him. Anyway, everything went off nicely at the doctor's house, and I got the 'body' into the car and started back for you. Then I had a flat tire."

He shook his head. "We live under the power of a perverse nature, you know. The tricks of fate are always against you in this business. I stopped to change tires . . . and right then a nosy Vopo came over to see what I was up to at that time of night."

Vance felt a chill in his spine. "What did you say?"

"Told him I was taking my brother's body to my house for the

wake. Had to tell him that, of course, because I had the tail-gate down and there were the good doctor's feet sticking out from under the blanket. And would you believe it? That's the moment the doctor started acting up, making disgusting noises in his throat and waving his hand—"

"My God, Colonel! What did you do?"

Luft floored the accelerator and the car hurtled down a dark, deserted boulevard.

"What could I do? Shot him, of course."

"Shot him!" Vance fairly howled. *"Shot the Vopo?"*

"Well, who else? He's in the back there with the good doctor."

"Colonel, Colonel!" Vance wailed. He was utterly appalled by the intelligence.

"Self-defense, of course," Luft commented, taking incongruous pains to dodge around a scrawny alley cat crossing the road. "As soon as the fool doctor commenced his nonsense, the Vopo turned to me with a dour eye and reached for his pistol. I had no alternative."

"God, God!" Vance muttered. "Two murders!"

Luft shook his head reprovingly.

"It's no good using the term murder in a war, Vance. And believe me, certain aspects of a cold war can obtain the same intensity of heat as that of a hot war. The Vopos are my enemies, and right now anyone who is my enemy is also

yours, and your countrymen's too. Someday soon your countrymen might be fighting this Vopo's comrades with nuclear weapons; but until that day I have to do their fighting for them—down back alleys and in obscure hotels rooms, with silencers and knives and garrotes."

Then he chuckled, dispelling the depth of his thought with humor.

"Don't get me wrong. I'm not complaining. This is my business. You couldn't pay me enough to go into another. Now let's see," he said, slowing the car's momentum,

scanning through the window on his side. "There's a little street around here I want. We'll have to hide this car until I can return for it later. Then we'll have to do something about our uninvited hitchhiker."

Vance straightened up in his seat. "Colonel, how are we going to get back to the West? I take it we aren't going to drive."

"Drive? Through the barricade? With the good doctor in the back? Good Lord no! That would never do. That would be bald-face suicide. No no, Mr. Vance. I have something far more spectacular than that planned for your night's outing."

Vance stared at Colonel Luft. "What?" he asked hopelessly. "What is it you have planned, Colonel?"

"We're going to dynamite a hole in the Concrete Curtain, Mr. Vance," Luft said energetically. "Everything's already in place: I set up my charge and detonator and the plunger days ago— Ah, here's our turn!"

Vance closed his eyes and folded his hands in his lap. *Please,* he prayed with quiet desperation, *please let me wake up soon.*

THE OLD BOMBED ruins tumbled on either bank of the alley-like street, nameless, gutted buildings rising raggedly out of huge slag heaps of rubble. Luft killed his lights and turned down a narrow black drive. The car went bumping and lurching over odd bits of masonry and then stopped before a squat dark building.

"If you'll go up to the face of that building, Mr. Vance, you'll discover a sliding door. Will you open it for me, please? I want to hide the car here for the night."

"For the night? You mean you're coming back here tomorrow?"

"Certainly. You don't think I went through all this digitalis-morphine business for nothing, do you? The East Berlin authorities now have the good doctor registered as dead; my next job will be to see that he is registered as buried. Then everything will be nice and neat and official. The door, please?"

Vance left the car and opened the door for Luft. He had no idea what the building was or might have been, perhaps a part of a factory once. Luft came around to the tail-gate and let it down. He had a penlike torch which threw a spot of light the size of a dime. Vance saw two pairs of feet, one in oxfords, one in boots. Luft grabbed the boots by the ankles.

"Watch the doctor for me, will you?" he said, muscling the dead Vopo up to his left shoulder. "I want to dispose of this."

Vance said nothing. He leaned against the tail-gate and listened to Luft stumble off into the dark. *He's going to put him down some convenient well or crevice or rubble-clogged cellar,* he thought blankly.

And I stand here and wait for him —with a drugged, kidnaped man.

Luft came back breathing heavily and rubbing his palms.

"Has the good doctor been behaving himself?" he asked.

When they got the doctor from the car they discovered that his legs were made of rubber and that all he wanted to do was slither to the ground in a boneless-like senseless heap. *"Was ist's?"* he mumbled.

"There!" Luft said irritably. "I knew he'd be troublesome. Get him between us—left arm over your shoulder, grab his wrist. So!"

They started walking the doctor between them, though it was more drag than walk. How far or long they meandered in this haphazard fashion was beyond Vance's reckoning. He'd lost track of time and direction. He stumbled over unseen bits of rubble, caught his breath in rasping gasps, and swore blue words he hadn't used since boyhood.

"We're doing fine, just fine," Luft whispered encouragingly. "It's a bit of a chore to reach the wall—they've blocked off 300 yards of empty houses facing it. But I have my own passageway."

Oh, of course! Vance thought spitefully. *You have everything. You know everything. You primordial throwback. You're so damned smart, yes you are.* He was ready to sit down and bawl.

Then Luft said, "See that mound ahead? We'll go over the top of it."

The mound was as long as a football field and looked as high as a mountain to Vance. *Oh God,* he said. But minutes later—as they wearily gained the summit of the rubble hill, he was glad they'd used the short cut.

Luft hissed, "Down!"

As they dropped in their tracks with the groggy doctor, Vance saw an armed Vopo coming along the street below them. He had a flashlight and he played the beam on the pavement ahead of him.

"Do you have any idea what historical site we are on top of?" Luft whispered.

Vance shook his head impatiently. It seemed like a damned silly time for a guided tour.

"The remains of the bunker where Hitler died," Luft informed him.

It was awesome news to Vance—repugnant, too, though he didn't know why. Then Luft murmured Let's go," in his ear, and Vance was almost happy to raise the balky doctor and start the long haul again.

How long it went on he didn't know, but it seemed that all of his life he had walked with Luft down one twisted street after another, lugging the helpless doctor. Then Luft said, "Here," and they stumbled down a dank stairwell and into a corridor which was as black as India ink. Vance could hear the pitter-pat of little scurrying feet in the surrounding murk.

"Rats," Luft said.

We can become lost in here and the rats will eat us alive, Vance thought. He wanted out badly. The place smelled of mold and stagnant water and old damp newspapers, and he was suddenly reminded of the Phantom of the Opera, in his sewer home.

Then they were climbing steps, the doctor's feet bumping and dragging over each curb. At long last they stepped through the issue of the pit and into a vast starlit courtyard. They were in the no man's land of empty buildings and cleared ground. It was like the discovery of a long lost city. Eerie, ghost-ridden, it emanated a forlorn sense of man's misguided endeavors.

But Vance expelled a sigh of relief. Freedom was right next door.

Then Luft sucked his breath sharply, jerking the sagging doctor and Vance to a halt. Far off across the courtyard the whorl of a torch glared under an archway. *Vopos!* Vance thought wildly.

The drug-punchy doctor wagged his hands and spoke enigmatically.

"Hinunter in den kellern."

Instantly the distant flashlight sliced toward the three men.

"This way!" Luft grunted, as he lunged to the left, the momentum of his abrupt movement dragging the doctor and Vance with him.

"Halt!"

Vance tripped on a board, swore and found his footing. He didn't know where they were going. The darkened, silent buildings loomed overhead ominously. A spoke of light played along a concrete wall off to their right. The doctor scuffed his feet and rolled his head.

"Bitte?" he asked sleepily.

They turned into a narrow alleyway and collided with a stand of trash cans in the dark, upsetting them with a ghastly racket.

Luft cried, "Vance, don't drop the doctor!"

Vance raged back childishly, "Oh, shut your fat mouth!"

A gaunt building, one-dimensional in the night, stood in their path. The end of the passageway was clogged with a gigantic rubbish heap. Luft steered them toward it, saying, "Up!"

Now they were struggling up the sodden, stinking heap, back-sliding, slipping, their feet sinking in, lugging and hauling and heaving that damed doctor along. Vance could see an open doorway at the top of the mound. Then he heard the *brap-a-dap* roar of a burp gun somewhere in the alley below.

God, he prayed, *don't let me die on this garbage pile.*

In the last desperate mouth-gasping, lung-pounding, leg-dragging, bullet-spattering lunge up the mound, Vance had the startling, brain-whirling conviction that none of this was happening—couldn't be happening to the peace-loving, unobtrusive, sedentary man he'd always known as Peter Vance.

This can't be me, he thought. *My God, it just can't be me!*

Then they were piling through the doorway and Luft was pushing the butt of the silencer into Vance's hand and whispering rapidly, "You'll have to hold them off while I get the doctor downstairs and blow the wall. When you hear the blast, come running like a bat out of hell!"

"No! Wait, Luft! I can't—"

But Luft had already been swallowed down the black gullet of the corridor. Vance could hear him hauling the bumping, muttering, foot-scuffling doctor away. He turned with a sick-empty feeling deep in his spastic stomach and dropped to his knees behind the jamb of the door.

The pistol butt was warm in his moist palm.

A whistle pierced the night, dimly he saw two Vopos running along the alleyway, coming on.

"Don't!" he cried. "Get back!"

The Vopos slid to a momentary halt, then sprang right and left for the shadows. Then one of the shadow-pools opened up with quick bright stabs of orange flame, the burp gun going *bop-bop—bopbop-bop!*

Vance flattened to his stomach as the bullets came spat-spat-spatting on the door frame and walls and ceiling around him, his ears ringing with the harrowing *pweeeng* as one of them went whining off in a ricochet.

I never asked for any of this, he said hysterically.

His mouth grimaced. He aimed the pistol over the sill, took a sight on the distant righthand shadow and jerked the trigger, the pistol jumping, and jerked again, ducking now as the shadow on the left sparked alive with a shocking *bra-da-dat!* Then he put two quick snap shots into that place and heard a howl, and almost instantly the one on the right cut loose again and he pancaked as splinters of wood flew in front of his face and over his head.

Vance wormed into a new position and the pistol leaped in his hand again, again, again. And then he was jerking on an empty clip.

God, he said. *What now?*

The floor bounced under his stomach and the walls sprang away from him as an appalling explosion shattered his equilibrium, throwing him into a glassy ball of shimmering sound. *He's done it! The madman's blown the Concrete Curtain!* He shoved up to his feet dizzily and went stumble-lurching down the black passage like a small boy walking one foot in the gutter and one on the curb.

He found the staircase by falling down it, ankles over appetite all the way to the bottom and into a dark nightmarish room of swirling smoke and throat-grabbing plaster dust; but he didn't care, because he was on his hands and knees now and crawling over the bricks and bits of wood and shards of glass toward a vague, ragged hole opening

onto a starbright boulevard. The West.

"Vance! Vance, help me with the doctor! We're over here."

Vance told Colonel Luft what he could do with the doctor. His voice was nearly a hysterical shriek. Then he added, "Leave him! Those Vopos are coming. I'm getting out of this while I can!"

He was on his feet now. The hole in the room's outer wall was ten foot wide and nearly up to the ceiling, and he stumbled toward it gratefully.

He started to giggle idiotically. Sanctuary was only a good spit's length away—

"Vance—I'm hurt," Luft said in the mistlike dark. "I can't carry him, and I can't leave him."

Vance stalled. He felt like a soggy paper bag full of water. Everything was draining out of him. He hated Luft's disembodied voice, hated Luft, hated the doctor too. *God,* he said. He turned and went back for them.

Luft was on his knees behind an overturned table. The doctor was prostrate in the dust at Luft's side. Overhead Vance could hear the *clop-clop-clop* of boots running in the corridor. Someone shouted, *"Los!"* and a siren wailed its warning of woe. It was going to be a very near thing.

He stooped and got the doctor under the armpits and snatched him up with a fast jerk and jackknifed himself into the doctor's midsection and caught him in the fireman's carry.

"Are you all right?" he gasped at Luft's silhouette.

"Sliver of concrete in my left shoulder. Can't use the damned arm. Get going! I can walk."

Vance got going. He lurched for the hazy hole in the Concrete Curtain. It seemed to be the longest walk he'd ever made.

THE TWO CIA men (Vance could only assume that's what they were: no one had bothered with introductions when the two raincoat-clad men had picked them up in the Wedding district) left them off before the emergency entrance at the hospital. The driver leaned across Luft and opened the door for him, saying:

"Hate to leave you on your own again, but it's best that we get the doctor here over to headquarters as quick as possible."

"Quite all right," Luft said agreeably. "I have some more work to do tonight anyhow. Come along, Mr. Vance."

Vance got out of the rear of the car and went into a shivering chill. He didn't know if it was the cold night wind or just nerve reaction. One thing he was certain of: his digestive tract would never be the same again.

"Nice bit of work tonight, Brown," the driver said to Colonel Luft. Then he punched a button on the dash and the sedan slid quietly,

rapidly down the dark street and was gone. Luft smiled after it.

"And that's the last of the good doctor, thank God."

"Come on," Vance ordered. "Let's have that shoulder attended to. How are you going to tell them it happened?"

"Oh, I don't know," Luft said airily. "Some outlandish lie will pop in my mouth when they ask me. You don't really have to go through all this nonsense with me, Mr. Vance. You might as well go back to your hotel and family."

But Vance shook his head. He felt responsible for Luft, somehow.

"No, I'll just see that you're all right."

Then Luft slowed his walk and canted his head quizzically.

"You surprised me tonight, Vance. Until we reached the *Schandmauer* I had you classified as the perfect milquetoast. Then you suddenly took over and started to behave like a proper soldier. What happened?"

Vance flushed. Now that it was over he felt embarrassed.

"I don't really know," he said honestly. "I suppose it was the accumulation of things that had happened to me tonight. I just became sick and tired of playing the part of the frightened spectator getting shoved from pillar to post. When those Vopos started to machine-gun me something snapped. I started to fight back."

Luft grinned. "Well, it was a good thing I had you with me after all. Otherwise I might have had a little trouble getting the good doctor out."

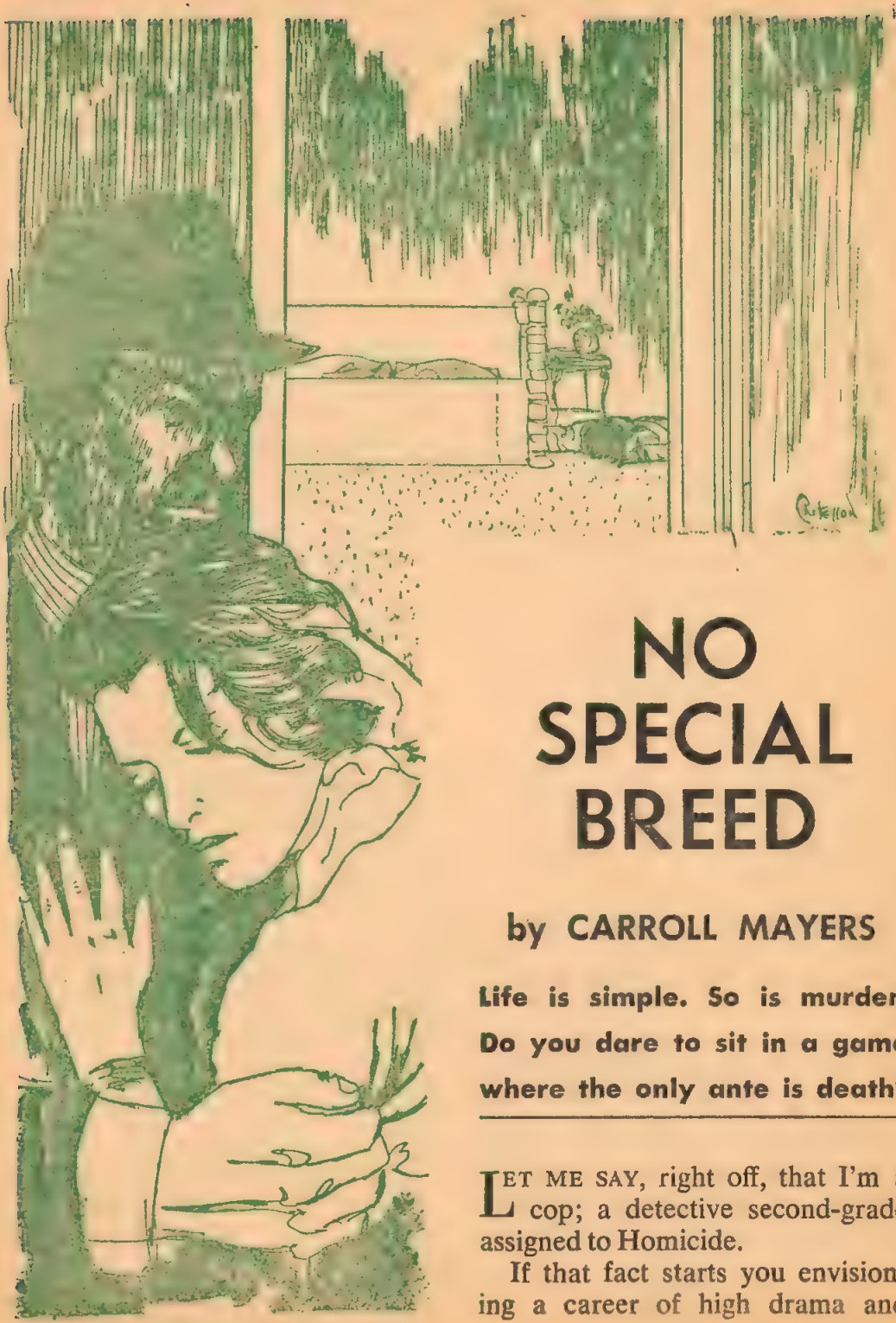
That, Vance thought cryptically, *is the damnedest understatement I've ever heard.* "Are you really going to try to reenter East Berlin tonight?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. Have to. No rest for the wicked, you know. I can always dream up some scheme or other to get myself through the barricade. The biggest problem I have right now is where to find a nice fresh unmarked body to take the good doctor's place." He shook his head regretfully.

"Pity I had to waste that Vopo, but of course the East Berlin undertakers would cast dubious eyes on a corpse with a bullet hole in it. *Hmm.*"

Suddenly Luft lifted his head and Vance detected a gleam of speculation in his sharp little eyes. "That General Reuter now," he muttered. "He's been making himself a bit of a pest lately—"

Vance rolled his eyes heavenward and shoved open the glass door to the emergency ward. Somehow he doubted that Colonel Luft's 'problem' would remain a problem for long.



NO SPECIAL BREED

by CARROLL MAYERS

Life is simple. So is murder. Do you dare to sit in a game where the only ante is death?

LET ME SAY, right off, that I'm a cop; a detective second-grade assigned to Homicide.

If that fact starts you envisioning a career of high drama and

suspense, stop. Any police officer encounters those elements, yes. Most of the time, though, his life is no different than the rest of the world. He has the same feelings—love and hate, fear and anguish—and he's subject to the same weaknesses and temptations. I make the point so that perhaps you'll understand something of what happened tonight.

When my wife Sue took her life a year ago, after only fifteen months of marriage, I was agonized almost out of my mind. I grieved for weeks, caring little for my job, less for myself. Gradually, though, simply because even grief must run its course, life began to take on some meaning again. When I finally licked my despair, it was because a new love had been kindled.

It wasn't the same as with Sue; none could ever be. But it was no less real, even though it was several months before I recognized my true feeling, realized I'd found a girl with whom I wanted to—*needed* to pick up the thread of my existence.

Her name was Gloria Bord and she was a singer, currently billed at a small cafe. If the combination—a cop and a canary—sounds funny, I can only say it wasn't. I merely knew I wanted Gloria, strongly, and hoped she felt the same about me.

I met her one night when, off-duty, I dropped into the cafe for a drink. I was in the lounge, finishing a Scotch and soda, when Gloria did her turn, backed by a four-piece combo.

She wasn't especially beautiful; her green eyes had an odd slant and her jawline was almost angular, but her lips were soft and generous and her slim arms suggested she could hold a man close.

I was aware of an immediate flicker of attraction, and when she finished her performance, drifted over to the bar for a daiquiri, I had to speak to her.

It wasn't a very smooth pass. As she sipped her drink on the stool next to me, I smiled, told her, "I'm afraid you'll never get very far that way."

Those green eyes weren't offended, only puzzled. "What way?"

"Singing songs the way they were originally written," I said. "Most of them dirty it up."

"Oh?"

"Yes. These days, it's refreshing to hear a song done right."

"Thank you." She returned my smile, her gaze appraising but friendly. "I'm pleased you approve."

I caught the intimate scent of her hair. It did things to me.

"I do, indeed," I told her.

She finished her drink, brought back her smile. "Thank you," she repeated.

That was all; merely a rather impersonal exchange, with no at-

tempt at introduction on my part. But as Gloria left the lounge I was conscious that my pulse had picked up a beat. I knew I'd be coming back.

The next evening, Gloria showed no sign of recognizing me, left the lounge immediately after her performance. On the third night, though, she again came over to where I sat at the bar.

"Obviously a true music lover," she said simply, her level look as friendly as when we'd first met.

"I told you how I felt," I said. "Incidentally, Miss Bord, I'm Guy Goeller. And I do enjoy your songs."

She extended her hand. "It's nice of you to say so, Mr. Goeller."

Her grip was warm, firm; I met her gaze frankly, aware my chest was again constricting.

"I'd prefer Guy," I suggested.

She nodded pleasantly and that appraising look was back in her eyes. "All right! If it's also Gloria."

So that was how our friendship started. Ensuing nights, when I wasn't on duty, I'd call for Gloria after her last show and we'd go for long drives in the country, or seek out intimate little bistros with candles and checkered table cloths. Weekends, we'd go to the beach, then driving again, dancing.

As I've said, I finally realized that my regard for Gloria was truly deep. I felt that she returned my affection, but I didn't know how fully. In addition, at times I'd noted a vague adversity, a nebulous, perhaps painful, exigency on her part.

I tried to bring our relationship into focus late one evening in one of our favorite off-beat haunts. I told Gloria about Sue, about her suicide, how the whole tragic affair had hurt me.

Gloria's lips pinched tight as I spoke and her breasts lifted sharply.

"Oh, Guy," she breathed, "how horrible . . . for both of you!"

My hand found hers.

"I loved Sue deeply, thought I never could love another woman," I said earnestly. "But I was wrong; you've made life worth living again. I need you, Gloria, and I want you to marry me."

She bit her lip, looked away.

"Please," she said softly, "don't ask me that."

"But I love you—"

Abruptly, her eyes were misty. "I—I know you do, Guy. But please—can't we go on as we have?"

"You mean you don't care that much for me?"

Her voice trembled.

"You know I do," she whispered.

"Gloria," I asked, "what is it?"

"I'm—just tired."

I searched her face; beneath my hand, her fingers were cold.

"It's more than that," I pressed.

"No. Honestly." Gloria stood up, manufactured a tiny smile.

"I'd like you to take me home now."

I pressed no more. Gloria, I sensed, was in the throes of some deep emotional conflict, and further probing would only intensify her distress. Perhaps another time—

But future dates brought no change in her. Gloria steadfastedly refused to discuss marriage. And her quiet desperation continued to nag me.

And so we come to tonight. Scheduled by Captain Kinney to report for stand-by duty, I had no plan to meet Gloria after her last performance. Kinney was new to the precinct, a stickler for regulations and personal appearance. I'd just verified the crease in my trousers, given my shoes a liberal application of polish, when the phone rang.

It was Gloria. She spoke without preamble, her voice flat, controlled, but unmistakably laced with a hint of crisis.

"I must see you," she told me. "Please come over right away."

"What is it?" I said. "What's wrong?"

Gloria did not amplify. "Please, Guy,—hurry!" she said tightly, then broke the connection.

Her apartment was but a short distance from my own; I reached there in a matter of minutes. Gloria's face was starkly white and her eyes mirrored an anguished numbness. I tried to take her in my arms. "Darling—what's happened?"

She stepped back, lips quirking, nodded wordlessly across the living room to her bedroom, the door of which was closed.

I regarded Gloria for only another moment, then crossed over, opened the bedroom door.

The man's body sprawled face-up between the foot of Gloria's bed and her vanity. He was a thin, sharp-featured character clad in a cheap off-the-rack brown suit. There was, I saw, a nasty bruise squarely in the center of his left temple.

I knelt, felt for a heart beat. I could detect none. I straightened. I was no stranger to death.

A sob echoed behind me; I wheeled back to the living room. Gloria, her control snapping, rushed into my arms with a tiny cry. "Oh, Guy, it was so horrible! But I didn't mean to kill him! It was an accident!"

I held her close.

"I believe you, dearest," I soothed, stroking her back. "Just tell me whatever there is to tell."

Gradually, Gloria's trembling lessened. Drawing a deep breath, she disengaged herself, sank upon a divan. She didn't look at me.

"I'm an addict," she said simply. "A drug addict. I've been on heroin for over two years."

My heart lurched, all my persistent wonderment coalescing in shattering comprehension.

"Dear God, no!" I whispered.

Gloria wet her lips. "A girl gets tired, traveling all over the country," she said. "I thought drugs would ease the tension, give me a lift. I felt I could control it." Her knuckles were white in her lap as she managed to meet my gaze. "I wanted to tell you, but I just couldn't. And after what you'd been through with Sue, I couldn't let you involve yourself with me."

I heard her—but I wasn't really listening. I was conscious only of a foul taste in my mouth.

"He was your supplier?" I finally asked Gloria, glancing toward the bedroom.

She nodded slowly. "He'd never made advances before, but tonight when I went into the bedroom to get my purse, he followed me. He insinuated if I'd—be nice, he'd let me have the heroin cheaper. I slapped him. He started to maul me—"

Hysteria began to claim her anew. "I—I slapped him again—harder and he lost his balance, fell down. His head struck the edge of the vanity—"

Gloria was on her feet now, clutching at me. "It was an accident, Guy! I hit him, yes, but it was an accident!"

I should have comforted her, but the turbulence of my thoughts was overwhelming. I returned to the bedroom, glared down at the crumpled form. A pusher! A filthy, despicable, scum of a pusher!

When I turned back, a few minutes later, Gloria was sobbing on the divan. Now I did try to comfort her.

"Don't worry, darling," I said, "everyone will believe it was an accident. Just don't keep going over it in your mind."

My assurance only partially calmed her. "But suppose they don't?"

"They will," I stressed. "Now get yourself together. After a squad detail gets here, we'll go down to Headquarters and I'll ask Captain Kinney to listen personally to your statement."

The homicide detail responded promptly to my call. Once they'd taken over, inspecting the scene and the corpse, awaiting the arrival of the medical examiner, I drove Gloria to Headquarters.

There, proceedings were brief, formal. Captain Kinney, a shrewd, hard-bitten cop who had come up through the ranks, did sit in while Gloria dictated her statement, but afterward he permitted the routine to take its normal course. Gloria, still badly frightened, was led away to Women's Detention. I contributed a brief account outlining my own relationship with Gloria, how she had phoned me in her distress, and was then excused from any stand-by duty for the night.

Whereupon I promptly returned to my own apartment, got out a bottle of Scotch and deliberately set about getting drunk.

After the first couple of drinks, the usual warm glow engulfed me, and subsequent shots brought a state of euphoric numbness. The only trouble was, my mind wouldn't get numb.

The buzzer, when it sounded, roused me. Weaving slightly, and unwittingly carrying the bottle of liquor with me, I went to the door. Captain Kinney's knowing eyes regarded me stolidly. "I thought we'd have a private talk, Goeller."

"Yes, sir." I motioned Kinney inside. As he advanced, he continued to study me. "Are you drunk?"

I replaced the bottle in the liquor cabinet.

"No," I told him shortly.

"But you've been hitting that bottle hard?"

"You could say that."

"Any special reason?"

A small tocsin echoed at the back of my skull.

"I don't follow you," I said.

He shook his head. "I think you do, but we'll pass over that for the moment." He took a convenient chair.

"I know it's painful," he went on, "but I'd like to talk about your wife."

I sat down myself; a lump was in my throat as I returned Kinney's gaze. "What about Sue?"

"She took her own life?"

"It's all in the records."

"I don't want to read records. I want to hear it from you."

"Damn it, Captain—"

"That's enough, Goeller," Kinney cut me short, his tone blunt. "Answer my question."

I slumped in my chair. All warmth from the liquor was gone now, I said, "Yes, she took her life."

"How?"

"She slashed her wrists."

"Why?"

The nausea swelled.

"She was on dope," I told him slowly. "I drew a lot of night duty and Sue became lonely, got in with the wrong crowd. She tried the stuff for kicks, then couldn't break off." I stopped, fighting the mounting sickness. "I didn't know, at first. When I found out, I tried to get treatment for her, but she didn't believe she could be cured."

I stopped again, breathing hard. "Sue brooded over her addiction, finally cracked."

Kinney continued to watch me closely.

"Your wife—and then Gloria Bord," he said soberly. "That's why you did it, isn't it?"

That tocsin was louder now, but

I steeled myself, kept my face wooden. "I still don't follow you," I said.

Kinney showed no sign he'd heard me, or that I'd even spoken. He regained his feet, stood looking down at me impassively.

"Gloria Bord's supplier wasn't dead when you first gave him that cursory check," he said, "but only badly stunned. When you went into the bedroom the second time, after you'd learned he was a pusher, you caught evidence of that. Probably the man's lips twitched or his eyelids quivered. Whatever, he wasn't dead until you kicked him in that already bruised temple—maybe several times—made certain he was."

Kinney paused, still studying me.

"That was why you had that bout with the bottle," he finished quietly. "In the heat of your act, you didn't stop to consider you were irrevocably committing Gloria to trial for murderous assault. Later, when you realized a jury might not believe her accident story, might think she had deliberately enticed the man into her bedroom to get him off guard, strike him down with some bludgeon she'd stowed there in a sort of crazed retaliation for her addiction, you were sickened."

There was no point in further carrying on. Kinney would not be talking as he was unless he had something more than mere theory. I inhaled deeply.

"What tipped you?" I said.

"The reports from the M.E. and the lab boys," he said. "I already had a hunch based on what I knew of your wife's suicide, plus Gloria Bord's statement tonight, and when the M.E. cited a foreign substance smeared into the hairs at the pusher's temple—"

He indicated my gleaming shoes. "I recalled your fresh shine this evening, and after the lab crew confirmed that substance as shoe polish—"

His expression was somber. "Are you ready to come in?"

I climbed to my feet. I felt completely drained, yet somehow glad, for Gloria's sake, it was over.

"I'm ready," I said.

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On Sale Everywhere

Nothing stood between him and millions—except a dead lady's bones.

the seven year hitch

by TALMAGE POWELL

FROM THE arched doorway of the fine old home, Mr. Peabody stared down the winding, tree-shaded drive.

"Mother!" he summoned his wife.

Mrs. Peabody came to the entry foyer behind him, breathless and slightly rumpled from house cleaning. "Yes, Mr. Peabody?"

"A car just turned in the driveway. Must be Teddy."

"Gracious, he's early!" Warmly plump, Mrs. Peabody shucked her apron and thrust it in the cloak closet.

As the sleek sports car with a lone occupant rolled to a stop, Mr. Peabody gallantly took his wife's jolly fat arm and hurried with her down the broad steps of the veranda.

The two old people reached the car as the young man was getting out.

"Welcome home, Mr. Hockins," Mr. Peabody said.

"We opened the house and cleaned it, as your letter instructed," Mrs. Peabody added.

"Thank you," Teddy said languidly. As he stood looking at the house, Mr. and Mrs. Peabody exchanged a covert glance.

Mr. Peabody cleared his throat. "Well, how does the place look after all these years?"

"As dreary as ever," Teddy said.

"Do get his baggage, Mr. Peabody!"

"Yes, Mother. Where are your bags, Teddy?"

Still staring at the house, Teddy Hockins extended his hand and dropped the car keys into Mr. Peabody's palm. Mr. Peabody hustled to the rear of the car, opened the deck, and began loading himself with Teddy's suitcases.

The house was drawing Teddy magnetically. A trace of jerkiness in his motions, he started trancelike up the veranda steps.

Beside her husband, Mrs. Peabody whispered, "I don't think he's glad to be back."

"Not a bit. The ghost of his mother and the memory of his terrible deed is still in that house. Seeing him, I'm more certain than ever. He never would have returned, if she hadn't been declared legally dead and the estate gone into probate."

"He'll stay only as long as necessary, Mr. Peabody."

Mr. Peabody nodded. "But it takes time to settle an estate. And there are other matters he must settle. Don't forget—he's lived like a prince these seven years, borrowing against his future inheritance. Before he is through here, we'll have time to do what must be done."

"We've a big job, Mr. Peabody. Until the day he died in office, Sheriff Tomerlin was sure Teddy had murdered the old lady. Yet he never found the first shred of evidence."

"Teddy was cunning," Mr. Peabody admitted. "He simply reported her disappearance, then waited, knowing the law would declare her legally dead after seven years. Now we'll be close to him, have the opportunity to watch and observe. The devilish memories have had a long time to ferment in him. He'll make a slip, Mother, that even he won't notice. It'll point us to the

truth—if our wits are sharp enough."

"Do be careful, Mr. Peabody."

"Now you quit worrying. I'm not a mean, neurotic old lady with a vapid, neurotic offspring I've driven to momentary madness. No, sirree. In a showdown, I'd whip Teddy with my right wrist tied to my left anklebone."

"I cant help being a bit frightened, now that he's actually here."

"I know," Mr. Peabody said gently. "But bear in mind, it's a job only we can do. If we fail, Teddy goes scot free with four million dollars, blood money."

Teddy Hockins dined by candlelight, his pallor almost lost in the large old dining room.

As she served him, Mrs. Peabody coaxed, "Another cocktail, Mr. Hockins?"

He looked at her morosely. "What are you trying to do, Mrs. Peabody?"

"I don't believe I understand, sir."

"You've been attempting to ply me with drink, Mrs. Peabody. Hoping to addle my wits, loosen my lips?"

"Really, sir—"

As she started to turn from the table, Hockins reached and caught her wrist.

"I know what you think," Teddy said, his eyes gloomy and chill. "What you've all thought for seven years. You and your husband have remained in the cottage on the rear of the estate, living on my monthly checks. You were necessary, to protect the place from prowlers and thieves."

She quaked. Was he saying she and Mr. Peabody were now no longer necessary?

"Surely, Mrs. Peabody, in all that time you've had a chance to go over every inch of the estate. But you had no more luck than the sheriff had years ago, did you? You've found no sign of a grave."

"You are mistaken, Mr. Hockins."

"Oh, come now. When I sent the keys and asked you to open the house, you had a couple of days to poke in every nook and cranny." A thin laugh came from him. "And yet—where are the bones, Mrs. Peabody?"

Later, as the light of a cold moon streamed through the cottage windows, Mrs. Peabody slipped out of bed. She moved to the window and stood looking at the dark, distant hulk of the Hockins house.

Mr. Peabody got up and came to stand beside her. They were fat and thin images of silver in their long nightgowns.

"I couldn't sleep either," Mr. Peabody said.

"He suspects us, Mr. Peabody."

"He suspects everyone. Encouraging, I'd say. Indicates a lingering doubt, a faintly remaining question in his mind as to whether the body might one day be found.

And this means it isn't perfect, means there's still the chance of finding it."

Mrs. Peabody stood with her face almost against the window pane. "But where? Years ago, Sheriff Tomerlin went over every inch of the estate. Not a blade of grass or a flower bed disturbed. No abandoned quarries or handy lakes in this area. No patches in the concrete floor of the basement to mark a grave. And our recent search of the house yielded nothing—no false walls in the closets or bones in old chests or trunks."

"No key to the attic, either."

"Don't forget—Tomerlin was too thorough to pass up the attic seven years ago."

"I know," Mr. Peabody said doggedly, "but Teddy didn't include an attic key when he sent us the keys from New York. I'll grant you the attic was empty. Now—I'd like to look again."

The lock on the attic door so fascinated Mr. Peabody that he failed to hear Teddy's silent approach.

"Peabody!"

Mr. Peabody whirled. Hockins was a thin, gloomy form in the scant sunlight filtering into the narrow passageway.

"What are you doing, Peabody?"

"I thought you might want the attic cleaned, Mr. Hockins."

"The attic is empty. It needs no cleaning."

"Yes, sir." Mr. Peabody started from the door.

Teddy blocked the way. "What did you think I have in there, Peabody?"

Mr. Peabody carefully wiped his lips with the back of his hand. If he doesn't get out of my way, Mr. Peabody thought, I'll break the young pup in two.

"Well, Peabody?"

"I considered the possibility," Mr. Peabody said coolly, "that you might have put a certain object in the attic after the sheriff searched."

"Really? You mean that an object was hidden in one place while the sheriff searched the attic, then slipped into the attic as the search progressed to other areas."

"Could be. Will you open the attic?"

"Of course not."

"The law might force you to."

"Go ahead, Peabody. Make a fool of yourself. The attic remains locked. Why should I admit any glimmer of truth in your wild accusation?"

Teddy Hockins stepped aside. "You may go now, Peabody. And by the way—I have all the necessary papers ready. My lawyer can take care of the remainder of my chores here. I'll be leaving tomorrow. I suggest you and your wife look for another position. I'll take into account your age and obvious senility and be generous with you."

Exasperation and frustration rose in Mr. Peabody, almost chok-

ing him. "So you've got away with it!"

"Peabody, really! I'd suggest you see a doctor. In view of your long term of service, I shall try hard not to be offended by you. Instead, I'll give you a few dollars to help you resettle. The cottage will be torn down. The house will be closed, never to be opened again as long as I live."

DISMALLY, Mr. Peabody sat alone in the cottage. Mrs. Peabody came in. Her cheeks were pink and damp from her labors in the big house.

"Are you ill, Mr. Peabody?"

"Yes, in a manner of speaking. He's leaving tomorrow. Pulling it off. Escaping for good."

She came and stood beside his chair. "Mr. Peabody, could we have been wrong?"

"No," he said. "I share the view that Sheriff Tomerlin held, rest him. An old lady simply doesn't walk out of her house one dark night and disappear."

"It's happened, Mr. Peabody. It's happened."

"But not to an old witch like her. She wouldn't turn her back on her house and money unless her mind cracked. And I don't believe her mind slipped over the edge that evening, as Teddy cleverly insinuated. She was slightly balmy, all right, but not in that way."

"She was fearful and it made her fearsome, Mr. Peabody."

"You can say that again! Afraid Teddy'd look at a girl his own age, or get interested in a business that would take him away from here. She made him what he was, and is. And the final rebellion took place the night he killed her.

"Oh, I don't say he meant to do it. I think they argued, like always, her alternately screaming and whining at him until he was half out of his mind. I think, as Tomerlin thought, that Teddy struck her—and when he saw that she was dead, he made her disappear."

Mr. Peabody had spoken so rapidly he was out of breath. He inhaled deeply and added explosively, "We've got to get in the attic—and we have to do it right now!"

Mrs. Peabody wandered about the room, apparently aimlessly. Then she stopped and regarded him thoughtfully. "Mr. Peabody, you were a wonderful fox-hunter when you were young."

Mr. Peabody raised his hands,

let them fall to slap his thighs. "Honestly, Mother—"

"You used to say to me: 'The fox is smart. He centers your attention in one direction so's you won't look in another.' You also said that Teddy would give himself away when he came back. Maybe he has done that, Mr. Peabody."

A momentary rigidity overcame Mr. Peabody. Then he jumped up and hugged his wife. "Mother, you are marvelous. The young fox—he centers our attention upward, when we should be looking down. The old lady's body is surely in the basement!"

"Not under the concrete floor."

"No good. Previously eliminated."

"But the basement walls were always kept fresh and white, Mr. Peabody."

"A fact that never meant anything before Teddy directed our attention to it," Mr. Peabody said. "A new inner wall, parallel to an old wall, could be painted white and would be right in keeping with the rest of the basement. A wall to form a crypt—the old lady's final resting place."

Mrs. Peabody was breathless. "We do work well together, Mr. Peabody!"

"I'll say. Now it's simple arithmetic to measure the base of the house outside, the basement inside, and determine—"

"Oh, dear! Oh, my goodness—" Mrs. Peabody gasped.

"Something wrong?"

"Where did he get all those bricks, Mr. Peabody? It would take quite a few, you know."

Mr. Peabody scratched his head. His brow knotted. He sat down glumly. Then he sprang to his feet again. "There's one way—and only one way—he could have made a grave with never a surface mark to show it. He carried the body of the crime down to the basement, removed a few bricks, tunnelled a short distance deep under the lawn, disposed of the evidence, replaced the bricks and painted over them. Given a whole night, even Teddy could have handled it."

"How can we prove it, Mr. Peabody?"

"We must make Teddy tip his hand."

Mr. Peabody was pecking with hammer and chisel on the basement wall when Teddy Hockins' shadow fell across him. Mr. Peabody paused with the hammer half drawn back. He turned slowly.

"What are we doing this time, Peabody?" Teddy said tightly.

"Examining mortar, Mr. Hockins. This house is nearly a century old. I'm positive the original mortar will differ in color and texture from mortar used seven years ago. Finding strange mortar, I propose to remove a few bricks and see what lies beyond."

Teddy Hockins slipped a small gun from his jacket pocket. His

face was very white. "Too bad you came in here, Peabody. I can't very well let you leave, can I?"

"I'd better warn you—Mrs. Peabody knows what I'm about."

"She won't get off the estate either, Peabody. I'm afraid the two old faithful servants are going to have a terrible accident when their cottage burns."

Mrs. Peabody stepped from behind a massive brick pillar and struck Hockins on the back of the head with a heavy piece of wood. Teddy lost sensation immediately and curled to the floor.

Mr. and Mrs. Peabody sprang to catch him. Between them, they carried him upstairs and stretched him on a sofa.

Teddy groaned. Mrs. Peabody sat down and pillowed his head in her lap.

"Well, Mother," Mr. Peabody said, "we've waited a long time."

"Yes, we have. And I'm sure Teddy will understand and accept the situation quickly and entirely."

"We'll give him the freedom of the world, Mother."

"So long as he treats us likewise. Ah—won't it be nice to have a son, in a manner of speaking, worth four million dollars!"

NEXT MONTH:

MURDER IN SAIGON

A Joe Rodriguez Spy Story Novelet

by TOM H. MORIARTY

Hidden, infinitely deadly, Saigon, the gateway to Red China, held a secret which threatened the free world. And somehow Joe Rodriguez must enter hell itself and destroy it . . .

I was marked for a rubout, and time was running out. I heard them say, "As for this bum—"

PROTECTION BREAK

by ALEX JACKINSON

THE REWARD was three G's. If you've a Caddy and a town house, or even a Chevvy and a bungalow, you won't risk your

neck for that sort of green. I've two kids and a wife who never complains, but when I see margarine on the table, I know that Ellen first looked at the butter.

Things like that made me ashamed of earning only sixty-five a week, net. It doesn't take much skill to deliver towels and aprons to fur shops.

So to me it was worth taking the long odds—on a hunch that stolen fur coats were being remade in the shop of Tarkus & Hentz.

I get into a lot of fur shops. In each I get a worse sob story than in the other. Not enough business to cover expenses. Tarkus and his partner Hentz bought fancy homes, new cars. That didn't have to mean they were crooks, but if you could look into their eyes, you'd savvy better what I mean.

After some planning, I figured out how I could stay in the shop after it looked as if I'd left. I closed the rear factory door like I had walked out. Sure that no one saw me, I crouched and waddled to the large nailing boards standing close to the factory exit.

In all fur shops a coat is first cut, then sewed, then nailed out flat on a huge board for drying. When not used, the boards are placed slantwise against a wall. It was in this inverted V space that I hid.

I sweated it out in the dark, a few times on the verge of sneezing. One good one, and chances I'd be laid up in a hospital so long, neighbors would take up a collection. Dust always sets me off; here a carpet of it lay around me.

Tarkus and Hentz were not mind readers, but they might guess why I was in the shop. Or they could regard me as a possible thief. If so, they might blow the whistle. I also knew that they employed as operators three ex-union gorrilas, who were in the shop now. I might be beaten and arrested.

I did speak of my hunch to Lieutenant Fisher, who was investigating the robbery, but he said coldly, "Stick to delivering towels. You won't get into trouble that way."

Which was sound advice. Only I still saw that reward cash swimming before my eyes.

Supposing I was caught and handed over to the thirtieth Street precinct? I might find myself in the pokey, perhaps doing a long stretch.

But maybe Columbus thought he'd wind up as fishbait if he didn't succeed. If you've got a set goal, you simply take chances. No two ways about it. If I wasn't caught in the morning, once the help came in, I'd just walk out. After all, I didn't intend to carry out anything. If I picked up some clues, I'd phone the police.

That was the plan.

Now I had dust to worry about. Dust and those sharp nails used to tack out the coats. Some stuck to

the seat of my pants. But as long as I made no noise I was fairly safe.

Behind me the wall was lined with thin strips of wood covering the burglary protection wires. This you see in all fur shops. From that end I couldn't be seen. Nor from the front, though there was the danger that some boards might be moved; and one of the partners might just get a notion to peek through the sides. That would be too bad for me. However, I knew I didn't exactly invite myself to a wedding party at the Waldorf.

My wrist watch was radium-treated. While I could see the numbers, it often seemed to me as if the coils moved backward. They didn't; it was time itself that got jammed up. But somehow the dials moved from five to six, then to six-thirty.

At seven the sewing-machines stopped whirring. I heard windows shut, then saw the lights go out. In a few minutes I was completely alone.

I straightened, but my knees buckled. In the semi-dark I hobbled to the chair nearest to me. In about a minute I jumped up, too excited to sit still. The cutting tables attracted me first.

I lit the lights, began to hunt where Tarkus had worked. Soon I had positive evidence that I'd sized up the situation correctly. *Sophie Elkins* was written in bright yellow-paint on the leather side of a persian lamb coat. Women who order coats in fur shops, mostly to chisel on the tax, are afraid of a switch. So they write their name on the skins with paint squeezed from a tube. Sophie Elkins had lost a persian lamb coat in that newspaper item you might have read! FUR STORAGE TRUCK HIJACKED.

From the start, my plan was to let police take over just as soon as I established a beachhead. This was it. Sneezing, and then smiling over the lucky timing, I crossed the factory to the office and show room side.

A phone stood on a large office desk fronting a window. Seating myself, I had to think out a few problems. I told Ellen I was going to a Turkish bath. A good sweat-out would help ease some arthritic pains in my legs. Maybe I'd stay all night, perhaps not.

Lieutenant Fisher had to be told, sure. But should I ask him to come over now, quickly, or should I pocket what I regarded as evidence and bring it to him? Either way I'd be asked questions, and I just couldn't pin down which way would be best for me.

Before I could decide, I heard the factory door open. I froze, instinctively crouching. Seeing the building chief, Ned Collins, my heart stopped making those alarm clock noises.

"It's me, Ted, the towel man," I said excitedly.

He approached me with gun drawn, face stiff. "Up with your mitts or I'll blast!"

I obeyed, gulped, but was glad I didn't speak. Some foggy thoughts had to clear first.

The chief knew me, but still held on to his shiny automatic. He picked up the phone. He could not dial without shifting his look from me, and he considered keeping me covered more important.

How much did he suspect I knew?

"I'll level with you, Ned," I said. "I meant to steal only one coat."

"Why just one?"

"For my wife, is all. Please give me a break."

He now managed to both keep an eye on me and use the phome. Signaling the operator, he said, "Get me CL three-zero nine eight four. I can't use the dial."

My hands began to feel crampy, but I kept them up.

Collins got his number. "Mrs. Tarkus? This is Ned Collins. Soon as your husband returns, have him dash back to the shop. Caught a thief on the premises."

Done, Collins again picked up the phone, again kept the gun pointed at me while the operator got him a number. This time he said, "Midtown Cafe? Check if a Mr. Hentz is at the bar. Very important."

The other partner was there.

"I don't know what the furrier said, but Collins told him to dash over. The tavern was in the neighborhood. In ten minutes Hentz could be here. Possibly less.

For me, the truth began to jell. Now I knew why police found nothing incriminating. Probably most of the factory help did not know even that the looted furs were brought up from a very convenient drop—the basement. Smartly. Only a few coats at a time, and when there was almost no chance of detection.

The chief. Chief crook.

Knowing, I felt a couple of clashing reactions. Along with the chills, it seemed as if every nerve in my body flamed. Like on those Iwo Jima days, sixteen years ago. I wanted to throw myself at the crab-faced bum, thinking I didn't care if he fired, so long as I could get my hands on his gangling throat. But I steadied. I had to be smart, not wild.

How? Only comic strip dicks won out against heavy odds. I wasn't Dick Tracy; I was me, plodding, unlucky Ted Nitkin, who saw a way of acquiring his own little business once the insurance company paid off.

If I moved off the chair he'd fire, and the law couldn't touch him. I squirmed, feeling against my thigh the head of a nail which remained stuck to my pants. Sweat became an itching acid on my face.

Heck, for the chance to do something big while at the same time nailing down a few crooks, I'd

risk my head between a tiger's jaws. I'm a good-natured slob, always ready for a laugh. Maybe I laughed to cover up the fact that I never amounted to anything. No trade. No education. So here I was, my slingshot ready to do double duty.

Afraid to draw my handkerchief, the sleeves of my loose-fitting linen jacket served to mop up my brow. Then I sneezed, a few times in succession. Now I had to pull my handkerchief. The chief said nothing, smiling sadistically as he half-sat, half-leaned on the edge of the desk, gun still levelled at my head.

My hands felt as if electric currents were shooting through my veins. The aches spread to my entire system. I lowered them, kept them lowered until Collins growled, "Your hands are rested. Up again!"

Instead of obeying, I made a forward motion, as if to grapple with him.

"Do that once more, goof, an' you'll have it, an' it'll be one hundred percent legal."

Now I was positive.

Collins spoke again. "You're parked on a nice chair. Stay that way. Only move away from the desk. Too many thing you could throw."

He was right. I'd begun to see a square electric clock, a glass desk set, a stapling machine, all of which Collins pushed to a far corner. He made me empty out the soap-filled pockets of my jacket, and had me move my chair to a side.

Soon I heard the door open, and then saw Mr. Hentz. While the chief explained, the furrier looked me over suspiciously, said gruffly, "You! What the hell goes on?"

"I must have gone haywire too think I could get away with stealing even one coat." *Play it dumb,* my thoughts said. *Beg. Grovel.* "One coat is all I meant to swipe, Mr. Hentz. Please, please give me a break."

"Maybe. I'll decide when my partner gets here."

If they let me go, I'd come back in a few minutes with police. Minutes counted because without that *Sophie Elkins* clincher, I had no case—and did they know what I knew?

War of nerves.

Now I wasn't so much afraid of bullets. Had Ned Collins shot me before Hentz arrived—well, he'd have had an easier time explaining things to the cops . . . unless they'd claim I began to resist.

Soon the door again opened. This time it was Tarkus. Briefed, he snapped. "As for this bum . . . We got to huddle on this. Lock him in the safe."

I was marched into a large, camphor-smelling vault loaded with coats and skins.

The door shut. I would have been a sardine in a can, save that I had room to move around in. I could breathe, and that was about all I could do, move and breathe. Escape was impossible. Save—another nail, stuck to my pants, gave me an idea.

The protection wires! A break would bring the Holmes men, and bring them quickly.

The thumb of my right hand began to bleed from pressing the nail, but I hardly minded.

P.S. Technically, I was arrested —for being in a shop illegally. That didn't stop me from collecting. With the reward I bought an interest in a luncheonette. Now . . . things are just fine, thanks.

NEXT MONTH'S NEW U.N.C.L.E. NOVEL

THE BRAINWASH AFFAIR

What could it mean—how could it be checked—This new THRUSH master plot which robbed men of their senses, even as it stole their liberty and their lives? Somehow, Napoleon and Illya must find out!

by ROBERT HART DAVIS

You've thrilled to them on T.V.—and now, the movies. Now follow the danger-packed feats of Illya and Solo in a new novel—here each month!

The True Victor

Little brown umbrellas of death, they were—Just the size to send a devil to hell.

by DOROTHY PATTERSON GAULT

IN A SMALL place like Finchhead (pop. 12,000), the chief of police knows just about everyone in town.

Chief Benton knew Victor Moneysmith, but only by sight, and he'd never seen him in bed at seven—his handsome, arrogant features slack, his sunken eyes fixed on a private view of eternity.

Coroner Jump dropped the sheet back over the face. "His mother-in-law says he brought a mess of mushrooms from the woods back of the house, had her make gravy of them for a sirloin Tuesday night. She shared the steak, but skipped the gravy. He felt bad Wednesday morning, stayed home from work that day and Thursday, but refused to let her call in a doctor. When she tapped on his door this morning to ask how he was, he didn't answer, and she found him like this."

"What were his symptoms?" Benton asked.

"Fatigue mainly. Some shortness of breath."

"No abdominal pain?"

"That's the odd thing about it," Jump said, frowning. "He claimed what pain he had was higher up. In the chest."

"What about his wife?" Benton asked. "She away?"

"She's away all right. Died over a month ago, result of an illegal abortion. When the husband brought her to the hospital she was so toxic that all the antibiotics she had might as well have been water."

Jump sighed. "Lovely looking girl. One of those fragile ash blondes. He—" The coroner glanced at the sheet-covered form "—was all broken up. Claimed he was in favor of a family, didn't know of the pregnancy, or why she'd want to terminate it."

A muscle in the coroner's jaw ridged up. "We never did learn the identity of the butcher. The husband was in the dark, and she was too far gone to talk. When you think of all the couples who want kids and can't—" He broke off, reached down for his bag. "I'm booked for a tonsillectomy at eight, so I'll have to run. An ambulance is on the way, and Mrs. Jennings has authorized an autopsy. I'll get to it right after the t. and a."

As they descended the stairs, Benton asked, "Where is she?"

"Mrs. Jennings? In her room, dressing. You'll tell her why I had to leave, won't you?"

Watching Jump hurry to his car, Benton noted how stooped his shoulders were, how loosely the suit hung on his spare frame. Like a shirt on a rose bush. Poor devil worked himself to a shadow keeping his status-minded wife in symbols and their retarded daughter in a plush, up-state institution.

Light footsteps on the stairs ended Benton's reflections. Introductions over, he relayed the coroner's message and heaved an inner sigh of relief. A controlled individual himself, Benton found it harrowing to cope with those in emotional tailspins, and Mrs. Jennings was obviously a steady hand-on-the-tiller type.

Inviting him to the kitchen for coffee, she listened thoughtfully, answered his questions with a nice economy. She'd come from Haslin, Ohio for her daughter's funeral, stayed on to keep house for her son-in-law until he had time to decide on permanent domestic arrangements. Describing the mushrooms as yellowish tan with a conical, honey-combed outer surface, she regretted she'd flushed the trimmings from them down the disposer.

"Sounds like morels, and they're harmless," Benton told her.

One of her eyelids fluttered; she rubbed it with a finger. "Whatever they were, I wish I'd refused to cook them, but Victor was so confident, I presumed he knew what was edible and what wasn't."

Benton took a swallow of coffee, thought what a pleasing appearance she made with the abundant, dark hair brushed back into a twist, the gentian-blue eyes with fine laugh lines raying out from the

corners. Something about her reminded him of the classroom. Manner? Or was it speech?

Whichever, it was persuasive enough to make him ask, "Have you been an instructor at some time?"

Smiling, she said, "Do you know a mother who isn't, off and on?"

Benton rose. "I've been through Haslin, know the college is its main business, and you have the air of a—"

"Schoolmarm?" she finished with a twinkle.

The buzzer announced the arrival of the ambulance men, taking Benton off the hook. Hand on the back door knob, he said, "I want to talk with the neighbors, so I'll cut across yards. It was nice meeting you, Mrs. Jennings."

Striding along the well-worn path, Benton thought how ideally situated the two houses were. Out from town, they had spacious gardens, a green stretch of pasture behind those, then the tangle of forest beyond. Someday he'd like just such a place.

The Millers, still in robes, received him with puzzlement that became shock when he explained what had happened next door. "But Vic's been a mushroom buff since he was knee—" Mr. Miller broke off and ushered Benton into the family room that adjoined the kitchen.

At the dividing counter, a six- or seven-year-old was perched on a stool, eating toast spread with peanut butter. When his mother said, "This is our son, Herbert; Chief Benton, Herbie," the boy swung round for a squarer view.

"Gee," he breathed, "a cop!"

"Police officer, honey. And you'd better get dressed; the bus'll be along soon."

Bare feet dragging, head twisted back over a shoulder, the boy allowed his mother to tow him from the room. "But what's he *here* for?" he demanded. Her low-toned explanation and his high-pitched queries became fainter as they went farther down the hallway.

Benton took the chair Miller indicated. "You and the Moneysmiths were well-acquainted, I suppose?"

Miller nodded. "The women especially. My wife was very fond of Ann. Then, when Emily—Mrs. Jennings, that is—stayed on after her death, we felt as though we'd always known *her*. She's that kind." Then to his returning wife, "Get him started?"

She nodded, then shook her head the opposite way. "I just can't believe Victor's gone. First Ann, then him. Poor Emily!"

Benton cleared his throat. "She and her son-in-law were close?"

Mrs. Miller hesitated. "Victor isn't—wasn't a person you could be really close to, but Emily did everything possible to please him. He was terribly particular about

meals, the way his shirts were ironed, that sort of thing. He'd even run his fingers over the tops of windows to see if they'd been dusted."

Herbie appeared, fighting his way into a knit shirt. As his roguish face emerged from the neck opening, he planted himself in front of Benton's chair. "Annie's with the angels, and she's got a boy just like me, because that's what she wanted more than anything. She told me lots of times."

"Herbie," his father said sternly, "Chief Benton is here to discuss Victor, and you're inter—"

"He ate something bad like my kitty did?"

"We're not sure, son," Benton said, "but he may have eaten poisonous mushrooms by mistake."

Indignation flared up in the round face. "The kitty wasn't a mistake. Victor gave *him* poison on purpose."

As Miller propelled his son out to wait for the bus, Mrs. Miller put on a deprecating smile. "We weren't absolutely certain about the kitten, you understand. It was just a guess."

Adding the dead cat to his mental file on Moneysmith, Benton braced himself for the next question. "Do you or your husband know why Mrs. Moneysmith had the abortion?"

Because her readable face showed strong feelings on the subject, Benton waited for her to spill them, but she maintained a stubborn silence. She and her husband were obviously underplaying their dislike of Victor. But why? Did they suspect the woman next door was involved in his death?

Summoning Mrs. Jennings to mind, Benton considered the intelligence, compassion, and humor of her face. To imagine it wearing murderous intent was next to impossible.

The front door slammed, the bus laboriously departed, as Miller returned. The chief waited for him to get his cigarette going. "Moneysmith was an enthusiastic mushroom hunter?"

Miller chuckled. "Was he! Claimed he built out here so he could beat the other buffs to the woods. And he was sharp. Why, he'd see ones I'd walk right past."

"Been out with him this spring?"

Miller's cigarette flared deeply. "No."

"Did he invite you to go with him Tuesday?" Benton asked.

"Yes."

"Any special reason for refusing?"

Miller tamped out the cigarette with deliberation. "Pure sloth. I'd have had to fall out at dawn." He glanced at his watch. "Unless you're about finished, I should call the office, tell them I'll be late."

"I'm nearly through," Benton assured him. "Moneysmith went to work at the usual time on Tuesday, then?"

"Eight-thirty on the dot," Mrs. Miller replied. "Crazy as he was about hunting, he never allowed it to interfere with his routine. He was a real crank about—" She checked herself, started over in a more casual tone, "He was quite methodical."

"How about Mrs. Jennings?" Benton asked. "She ever go hunting with him?"

"No," they replied in unison.

"She ever go by herself?"

"She hiked around the countryside some, but I never heard her speak of picking mushrooms," Miller said.

His wife caught her lower lip between her teeth, and Benton figured it was time for the crucial question. "Did either of you see her go into or come out of the woods on Tuesday?" Their faces told him this was the question they'd been dreading all through the interview.

With a heavy reluctance, Benton pushed on. "You saw her return from it?"

Mrs. Miller's Yes was almost inaudible.

"Was she carrying a container of some sort?"

Miller put an arm around his wife's waist, and she buried her contouring face in his shoulder. "I hate it too, honey, but we have to answer." Then, to Benton, "She was carrying a paper sack."

Thanking the couple, Benton left them and drove into town.

There was one matter he wanted to check before he talked with Emily Jennings again. It was a long shot, but long shots occasionally hit the mark. With his mind so occupied, he did something he'd never done before: parked in a restricted zone.

Mounting the steps of the public library, he pushed open the door, went directly to the window sill, where the college catalogues were stacked, the ones he and his son had studied before Ted decided on Ohio State.

Scanning the spines, he pulled out the booklet with "Haslin College" printed on it. Then, skimming the instructors of the various departments, he stopped at "Jennings, Emily B." A botanist, she'd traveled the same road as Ted: B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. Only Ted was in physics.

Replacing the catalogue, Benton felt no jubilance at having scored. Instead, he experienced much the same sensation that he had when a hood had shot up from behind an office desk and rammed a fist

hard into his belly. That time, he'd been too occupied with counter measures to assess his pain, but on the way back to the Moneysmith place, there was ample opportunity to dwell on the unhappy prospect of confronting an extremely likable lady with the damning bits and pieces that added up to strong suspicion.

Emily Jennings admitted Benton with serenity.

"I was certain you'd be back," she said, smiling. "Let's have another round of coffee, and over this one I'll tell you the whole truth. I didn't before, you know."

At the table, Benton took the cup she handed him. "Something changed your mind—about talking, I mean."

She nodded. "Two reasons. First: I was sure your interview with the Millers must have exposed the over-simplifications of my story—evasions, I should say. Second: I realized how foolish I'd been not to follow my instinct at our earlier meeting. You're obviously an intelligent, fair-minded individual with whom I can trust the true facts, no matter how incriminating they seem. For a starter," she continued in her direct manner, "I stayed on here after my daughter's funeral for one purpose only—to kill Victor."

Benton watched her raise the cup to her lips, attempted to view with a proper detachment the dark richness of lashes and gently curved brows, the still-luminous skin. It was not easy.

"Ann was spellbound by Victor," she went on, "but I mistrusted him from the first. He wanted Ann and knew he couldn't hide his true self for long, so he talked her into a runaway marriage before she had time to become disenchanted with him. He took that loving, blithe-spirited child who'd never known cruelty, nor learned the defences against it, and proceeded to crush her into a frightened, submissive automaton.

"Then, when he'd destroyed her individuality, he finished off what remained by forcing her to submit to an abortionist's furtive ministrations. Both were heinous crimes, yet no court in the country would convict him for either one."

After draining her cup, she went on, "I'm a botanist; Victor was a mushroom enthusiast; the season for the fungi was close. If I stayed on a week or so, I could add some lethal specimens when I cooked the morels he was so mad about. The plan seemed foolproof, and there was a possibility I might not even be suspected of wrongdoing, though that was not of primary importance."

Pausing to press the fingertips of both hands to her temples for a moment, she resumed the account. "Tuesday afternoon, I went into the forest and found a patch of Amanita, the type commonly known as 'destroying angels.' Tak-

ing them back to the house, I trimmed and floured them, wrapped them in foil and stuck the packet to the back of the refrigerator. When Victor arrived from work, I was beginning to saute the morels. He came out to rhapsodize over them, then left to shower and change. I got out the destroying angels, added four to the pan, keeping them off to one side.

"But, just as they'd started to brown, I realized I was about to place myself on the same plane as Victor. Too, looking beyond immediate revenge, I knew I could never again face a classroom of idealistic students, and, without Ann or my work, I could only look forward to embittered disintegration.

"So," she went on in the same unhurried voice, "at the last minute, I decided to undo what I'd begun. Picking out the four angels, I flushed them down the disposer and put the morels in a clean skillet to continue cooking."

Benton breathed a vehement, "Thank God!"

"Yes," she said, her voice gone flat, "but that doesn't alter the fact that Victor was dead this morning." With a puzzled frown, she added, "I'm certain I didn't overlook one of the deadly specimens."

"Could just one cause such a violent reaction?"

The lovely eyes clouded. "Yes. That's why I was so careful about eliminating the lot."

Benton rose.

"The autopsy," he said briskly. "I'll find out if there's a report yet."

Jump was still at the hospital.

"Oh, yes, Chief," he said. "I was about to call *you*. Get set for a surprise. It wasn't mushroom poisoning, but a coronary occlusion that finished off Moneysmith."

Benton expelled a deep breath.

"A coronary," he repeated for Emily's benefit. "Nothing more." Then, only half-listening to the coroner's clinical description of the findings, he relished the flash of astonishment, then the relief on her face.

When Jump finally wound it up, Benton replaced the receiver, beamed one of his total smiles at Emily. Making a determined effort not to show how much it mattered, he said, "You'll be around for a while, won't you? I owe you a dinner at least for putting you through such an ordeal."

Regretfully, she replied, "You make it difficult to say no, but I must. The retired professor taking my place isn't at all well; I should relieve him at once."

They shook hands at the door, and, when Benton reluctantly headed for his car, Emily turned and went upstairs. Under different circumstances she might have enjoyed the chief's companionship, but in these it was unthinkable. And now she must concentrate on the last task to perform.

In her bedroom, she pulled one

of the drawers of the chest almost completely out, felt back along its underside till her fingers touched paper, pulled off the letter that was taped there.

Moving deliberately, because the pain in her head seemed to have coalesced into a stony mass with jagged edges, she eased down on the edge of the bed, picked up a folder from the stand, struck one of the matches inside it. Igniting a corner of the paper, she held it over a blue-flowered ashtray. Eyes racing the flames, she read the words that were indelibly etched in her mind, the last words Ann had written:

"You're not to fret, Mummy. A bona fide M.D. will do the operation, and it'll be over by the time you receive this. The doctor's a harried little man with the curious name 'Jump,' and Victor's paying him such a handsome sum, I'm sure he'll take pains about ending this small beginning. In a year or so, if I'm patient and try very hard to please Victor, I know he'll come around to wanting a family as much as I . . ."

Dropping the last fragment onto the tray, Emily rose, unlatched one of the casement windows, spilled the grey ashes into the wind's greedy grasp. The letter had served its purpose—and well. She hadn't even had to show it to Jump this morning. Just a brief description of its content, and the suggestion that the authorities might find it interesting had been sufficient. He'd assured her what the autopsy findings would be, even before he'd phoned Chief Benton to tell him Victor was dead.

Impatiently, she walked down the hallway, shut the door to Victor's room, returned to her own and began to pack. Then, the half-folded dressing gown slithering to the floor, she raised her hands, pressed the palms flat against her ears. It was no use. She could still hear the pain-crazed voice, undiminished: "Please call a doctor—please! These cramps are killing me—"

A NEW COMPLETE SOLO AND ILLYA NOVEL NEXT MONTH

MR. WONG and the FATAL PHOBIA

Who killed Flora Hobson? only a secret killer knew— and a certain Mr. Wong . . .

by DAN ROSS

A New MR. WONG and INSPECTOR BANNERJEE Story

IT WAS A foggy, wet night as art dealer Mei Wong waited in the entrance of Bombay's Empire Hotel for the expected police car bearing his friend Inspector Bannerjee of the homicide division. His broad face wore a look of perplexity as he considered the facts given him by the inspector in a hurried telephone conversation.

"Flora Hobson just commited suicide," the inspector had informed him. "I'm going to her place now. I know she and her nephew were close friends of yours. I thought you might like to come along."

So now he was waiting for the inspector, ready to make this rather unpleasant visit. He couldn't picture resolute, dominant Flora Hobson as a suicide. Yet it was possible. She did have one odd weakness. The wealthy old woman suffered from nyclophobia, a fear of darkness. He had heard many stories about this.

A sleek black sedan pulled up at the curb outside the hotel and the tall figure of Inspector Bannerjee jumped out lightly. Mei Wong, short and stout in contrast to his friend, padded quickly out into the drizzle of the street to meet him.

Inspector Bannerjee's bearded face showed gratitude as he

opened the rear door of the waiting sedan for him.

"Glad you came along," he said.

Mei Wong nodded, got into the car. The driver headed the vehicle out into traffic again.

As they drove toward the home of the late Flora Hobson the inspector said: "What do you suppose made her do it?"

Mei Wong shrugged his broad shoulders. "I can't imagine. Only last week she bought a valuable painting from me. Her nephew came and picked it up."

The inspector nodded. "That would be Walter Carraway. He's lived with her for some time. Did you also know that his half-brother Peter has been staying there for a few weeks as well?"

The art dealer showed astonishment. "I don't think I have ever heard of him."

"Sort of a roamer," the inspector said. "This is his first visit to India. I understand he was a seaman on a tramp ship. Injured his left leg while in port here and his aunt insisted he stay with her. You'll meet him tonight."

Within a few minutes they were driving in the palm-ringed roadway leading to the Hobson mansion. A servant let them in and directed them to the luxurious living room, where they found both Walter Carraway and his half-brother, Peter.

Walter, a thin blonde man in his thirties, came forward with an outstretched hand to greet them. "Sorry to give you so much trouble, Inspector." And then he nodded to Mei Wong. "Good of you to come as well."

After greetings had been exchanged, Walter Carraway turned and introduced them to his half-brother, who rose with some difficulty from the easy chair in which he'd been sitting and hobbled over, leaning heavily on a cane to greet them. He was a quiet, dark-haired man perhaps a few years younger than Walter but with a weather-beaten face that reflected his years at sea.

Then Walter took over again: "I don't know exactly what happened to Aunt Flora. She's been rather strange lately. From all appearances she deliberately threw herself over the small balcony outside her room. She was alone at the time. Peter was here in the living room and I was in my own room. A servant heard her cry out and the crash of her body on the asphalt drive."

He shook his head. "A very sad business, believe me!"

After the inspector had checked the remains and the spot where the body had been found, they went upstairs to Flora Hobson's bedroom. It was large and very ornately furnished, containing many of the Chinese art objects Mei Wong had sold her over the years. His eyes wandered sadly from a pair of crimson tapestries with yellow dragons to a large porcelain

vase on the dresser. So many familiar items!

Both Walter Carraway and his half-brother had made the journey upstairs and now stood in the room with Bannerjee and Mei Wong. It had been a particularly difficult ascent for Peter with his injured left leg. Now he stood leaning heavily on his cane.

"Of course you both must have heard my aunt suffered from nyclophobia, an insane fear of the dark," Walter said. "She rarely left this room after nightfall and the lights in here were never turned off. When a bulb burned out it was replaced at once. And as you may notice there is no way to turn off the power. The current that feeds this room is on one switchless circuit."

Mei Wong's eyes had wandered to the one modern touch in the big bedroom, an electric mantel clock. He said: "There was no power failure in this district tonight, was there?"

Walter Carraway looked bewildered. "Why do you ask that?"

The old art dealer studied him with shrewd eyes. "I wondered if perhaps your aunt might not have been subjected to a temporary period of darkness and in her fear ran out to the balcony and toppled accidentally to her death."

"There was no power failure," Walter Carraway said. "You agree, Peter?"

The dark haired half-brother nodded affirmation. "The lights never wavered all night."

Mei Wong turned to Inspector Bannerjee: "Then I fear Mrs. Hobson was murdered."

Inspector Bannerjee's expression became stern. "What makes you think so, Mr. Wong?"

"I still feel sure Mrs. Hobson's flight from this room was caused by her fear of darkness. I would assume someone deliberately saw that the lights went out here for a period." He looked at the nephew. "In fact I am positive the lights were off for a short time."

"How can you be positive?" Walter Carraway asked.

Mei Wong waved a pudgy hand toward the mantel clock. "It is indicated by the device on the clock face. The red dot there plainly indicates there was a break in the current. It goes on when the power goes off."

The blonde man studied the clock and a look of amazement crossed his face.

"You're right!" he exclaimed. "But who could have done it?"

Inspector Bannerjee sighed.

"I imagine we'll soon find that out," he said. "Where's the switchboard controlling the house fuses?"

"Downstairs," Walter Carraway told him. "In the utility room leading off the kitchen."

They all moved toward the door except Peter Carraway, who stood staring at the clock with a troubled expression. Leaning heavily on the

cane with which he eased his injured left leg, he turned to them with a sigh. "Why would anyone want to do this to Aunt Flora?"

Inspector Bannerjee's tone held sarcasm as he answered: "Generally these crimes are committed for profit."

And turning to Walter Carraway he said: "Have you any idea who your aunt's heirs might be?"

The blonde man looked pale. "She had only myself and Peter. But you're surely not suggesting either of us did this dreadful thing?"

"I'm not suggesting anything," the inspector said. "Can the fuse board be reached from outside the house?"

"Quite easily," Walter said. "There's a path to the back of the house through the garden."

Mei Wong was with Inspector Bannerjee when, with the aid of a flashlight, he traced the footprints from the main entrance of the house that led directly to the door of the room with the fuse box.

The prints were only fairly clear in spite of the soft, damp ground. But one feature of them was unmistakable—the mark of a cane at regular intervals beside them.

Inspector Bannerjee looked at Mei Wong with a sober face. "I'd say there was no doubt who tampered with the fuse and caused Flora Hobson's death."

Mei Wong nodded.

"No doubt at all," he agreed.

A few minutes later they faced the two nephews in the living room again. Both the young men waited expectantly to hear what they'd discovered.

"Have you found anything of help?" Walter asked.

"Yes," the inspector said. "We know who caused your aunt's death." And he gazed sternly at the man in the chair. "We found footprints leading to the fuse box. And cane marks beside the footprints."

"But I didn't do it!" Peter Carraway protested as he used the cane in his left hand to rise with difficulty.

Now it was Mei Wong's turn to speak. The stout art dealer took a step toward the dark young man. "Please do not distress yourself unnecessarily. I'm prepared to back up your statement. You are indeed not guilty."

It was Inspector Bannerjee's turn to show surprise. "How do you figure that, Wong?"

"By the cane marks," Mei Wong said calmly. "I took particular notice. They were on the right side of the footprints. Whoever tried to put the guilt on Peter Carraway's shoulders had an excellent idea, but in his hurry to carry it out he forgot that he carried his cane in his left hand."

Wong looked at a pale Walter Carraway. "Since only one other person had anything to gain by what happened, I do not think you will have much difficulty deciding on the impersonator."

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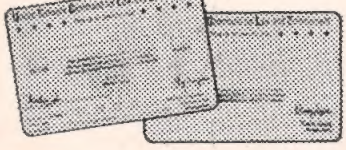

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